



THE
3
PRACTICE

OF

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION;

FROM RODRIGUEZ, *Quintana*
AND OTHER CATHOLIC AUTHORS.

BY
Lucas
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..
RECTOR OF THE CATHEDRAL.

'Thou shalt be perfect, and without spot, before the Lord thy God.'
Deut. xviii. 13.

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This new edition of the 'CHRISTIAN PERFECTION,' is published with our entire approbation, and hereby recommended to the perusal of the faithful.

† SAMUEL,

ARCHBISHOP OF BALTIMORE.

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THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE NECESSITY OF ASPIRING TO CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

WHEN the lukewarm and careless Christian compares the characteristic features of religion with the life which he is leading, he cannot help being struck with the alarming contrast which exists between them. He is candid enough to acknowledge the evil; but, unfortunately, he seldom traces it to its real and primary cause. He is apt to ascribe this criminal discrepancy, between his belief and his conduct, to external circumstances, or to certain internal principles of depravity, which he falsely deems it impossible for him to control: he ascribes it to the difficulties by which he is encompassed, the temptations to which he is exposed, the weakness and corruption of human nature; but these, however, are not so much the cause of his transgressions, as the means which the enemy of our souls employs to multiply them. It is to the erroneous notions which he entertains about perfection and the conditions upon which salvation is to be obtained, that his prevarications must be attributed. Let him once understand, that christian perfection is attainable in every state of life,—that, to aspire to it, is an indispensable duty,—and he will soon be persuaded to desire it, and embrace the means by which

it is to be acquired. It is true, in the beginning, he will meet with difficulties, apparently insuperable: the corruption of nature, the force of habit, the frowns of the world, will unite to retard his progress in the new course he is pursuing: he will have 'to put on the armor of God, that he may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand perfect in all things.'¹ But, 'the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory, when he has suffered a little, will himself perfect, and confirm, and establish him.'² 'Working in him that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.'³

'I wished,' says the wise man, 'and understanding was given me; and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me; and I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. Neither did I compare unto her any precious stones; for all gold in comparison of her, is as a little sand; and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay.'⁴ The true wisdom, to which we should all aspire, is christian perfection, 'esteeming,' with St. Paul, 'all things, to be but loss, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ.'⁵

This is the 'one thing necessary' on this earth;—all other things, even the most useful and valuable, are of minor importance; and, when contrasted with it, they appear of none whatsoever;—'for what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'⁶

The rule laid down by him, who has 'the words of eternal life,'⁷ is, 'to seek *first* the kingdom of God, and his justice.'⁸ And remark, he gives it, even to the exclusion of what seems most indispensably necessary,—'food and raiment.' These, he wishes us to regard as secondary things, for which we are to rely on the care of our heavenly Father.

1 Eph. vi. 13.

2 1 Pet. v. 10.

3 Heb. xiii. 21.

4 Wis. vii. 7. 8. 9.

5 Philip. iii. 8.

6 Mat. xvi. 26.

7 John vi. 69.

8 Mat. vi. 33.

‘Let not the wise man, glory in his wisdom—the strong man, in his strength—the rich man, in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth, and knoweth me, saith the Lord.’³ As St. Dorotheus was visiting the sick, one of his disciples, who discharged the office of infirmarian with great zeal and assiduity, said to him:—‘Father, I have a thought of vain glory, which tells me, that I do my duty perfectly well in this employment; and methinks you ought to be well satisfied with me.’—‘I allow,’ replied the abbot, ‘that you are a good infirmarian; but I do not perceive that you have, as yet, become a good Religious.’ Let every one compare his conduct with that of this careful infirmarian, and see if he is not in a similar predicament: an upright, honest, industrious man, perhaps a perfect gentleman, but *not*, as yet, a good Christian. What we value most in religious persons, says St. Ignatius, is not depth of learning, nor great talents for preaching, nor any other natural endowment; but it is humility, obedience, and a spirit of recollection and prayer.

If, therefore, our desire to possess any thing, is to be commensurate to its importance, great indeed ought to be the ardor with which we should aim at christian perfection;—neglecting no opportunity to improve ourselves in whatever relates to our spiritual advancement,—and applying to our temporal affairs and domestic concerns without overlooking, in the slightest degree, this important obligation.

‘Blessed are they,’ says the gospel, ‘that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall be filled.’² The word *justice*, which generally designates one of the four cardinal virtues, as distinct from the others, is here applied to virtue and sanctity in general. Whence it follows, that it is not enough to have a weak desire of perfection, but that we should hunger and thirst after it; so as to cry out, with the royal prophet, ‘As the hart panteth after the fountains of

1 Jerem. ix. 23. 24.

2 Mat. v. 6.

waters, so my soul panteth after thee, O God!’¹ This earnest desire is so necessary, that we can have but little hopes of such as do not feel its impulse.

The affair of christian perfection is not to be carried on by constraint; it is the heart that must undertake it. ‘If thou wilt be perfect,—come, follow me,’ said our Lord to the man who had kept the commandments from his youth, and asked what was yet wanting to him;² teaching us, by this answer, that an ardent desire of perfection is necessary to its attainment.

It is true, the great work of our salvation and perfection, depends not upon our own will alone;—it presupposes the will, and help of God; but he is always willing, always ready to help us. ‘He will have all men to be saved,’ says St. Paul,³—‘our sanctification is his will.’⁴ One of the sisters of St. Thomas of Aquin having asked him how she should save her soul—‘By willing it,’ replied the saint. All, then, depends on our will, and earnest desire—if we will it seriously, if we desire it ardently, we shall save our souls, we shall become perfect—heaven is ours, if we choose to have it.

And may not the appeal for the truth of this assertion be made to ourselves? Let us call to mind the days that are past: our fervor, our zeal, at certain periods of our life—at the time of our conversion—when we made our first communion, &c. Prayer, meditation, pious readings, the sacraments, were then our greatest consolation and comfort. Why were they? because, we were then fully determined to save our souls, and please our God in all things. So long as this fervor lasted, the performance of all our religious duties was easy and pleasing to us; but when it began to cool, they seemed painful and insupportable. If the same person is sometimes delighted, and sometimes disgusted with the performance of his religious duties, let him

1 Ps. xli. 2. 2 Mat. xix. 16—21. 3 1 Tim. iv. 10. 4 1 Thes. iv. 3.

not impute the blame of this change to them, but to his inconstancy, and the little relish he has for virtue and mortification. A strong healthy man, says Father Avila, will carry, with ease, a burden which a child, or a sick person could not raise from the ground. It is only from the different dispositions of our souls, that the difficulty arises. The duties are always the same. They once seemed to us so easy, that they cost us no trouble; and if they now appear different from what they were before, we are to blame ourselves for it—we have changed, but they have not.

CHAPTER II.

ON SOME GENERAL MEANS TO ARRIVE AT CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

SECTION I.

Earnestly to desire our spiritual improvement.

AN ardent desire of our spiritual advancement is one of the best dispositions for obtaining from God the graces necessary to arrive at christian perfection. 'He hath filled the hungry with good things,'¹ says the blessed Virgin in her canticle. The royal prophet had said the same, long before: 'He hath satisfied the empty soul; and hath filled the hungry soul.'²

This truth is clearly set forth by Solomon: 'Wisdom,' he says, 'is easily seen by them that love her, and is found by them that seek her.'³ She is at hand, the moment you wish for her. 'He that awaketh early to seek her, shall not labor; for he shall find her sitting at his door.'⁴ How infinite is the goodness and mercy of God! Though you have delayed to open your heart to him, and to comply with his inspirations, yet, he has not, on this account, gone away. He waits at the door till you open: 'He waiteth,' says Isaias, 'that he may show mercy to you.'⁵ No man was ever so anxious to see a most intimate friend, than God is to visit our hearts. He is more desirous to communicate himself, and grant his favors to us, than we are to receive them. 'The only thing he requires of us, is, to hunger and thirst after them. 'To him that thirsteth I will

1 Luke i. 53.

3 Wis. vi. 13.

5 Isai. xxx. 18.

2 Ps. cvi. 9.

4 Wis. vi. 15.

give of the fountain of the water of life, gratis.’¹ ‘If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink.’² One of the principal reasons, why we make so little progress in perfection, is, because we do not desire, and long for it so earnestly, as we ought. We have, it is true, some desire of it, but it is so weak and languid, that it expires almost as soon as it is felt.

St. Bonaventure says that there are many, who mean well, and who form the best resolutions; but who have not courage enough to overcome themselves so far as to carry them into execution. These resolutions without effect, are mere illusions, with which we may be pleased, but which will never produce a change in our conduct. ‘Desires,’ says the wise man, ‘kill the slothful: for his hands have refused to work at all.’³ Persons of this description are apt to imagine, while at their prayers, that they would do and suffer any thing for God; but on the first occasion that presents itself, they behave in a manner quite different from what they had fancied to themselves. And, in fact, it was not a real desire, but a sort of dream they had at the time. By some they are compared to soldiers, represented on the canvass, who hold their swords over the enemy’s head, but never strike. Such persons pass all their life in indulging vain and imaginary desires of perfection, and they are surprised by death, before they have performed any good work. They not only derive no advantage from these inefficacious resolutions, but they will be severely punished for not having carried them into execution. The reason is obvious: good resolutions are the effect of the grace of God, from whom proceed ‘holy desires, right counsels, and just works,’—the abuse of it increases our guilt, in proportion to its frequency. To use St. Paul’s comparison, ‘The earth that drinketh in the rain, which cometh often upon it, and bringeth forth thorns and briers, is rejected, and

1 Apoc. xxi. 6.

2 John vii. 37.

3 Prov. xxi. 25.

very near to a curse.¹ True desires require fervor, promptness of execution, and perseverance.

In the pursuit of the pleasures of the world, enjoyment produces satiety, and satiety creates disgust; but the more earnestly we apply ourselves to spiritual things, the more we relish them. 'They that eat me, shall yet hunger; and they that drink me, shall yet thirst.'² 'O! taste, and see,' says the royal psalmist, 'that the Lord is sweet!'³ This spiritual hunger and thirst is one of the surest marks that God dwells in our souls by his grace. For although, without a particular revelation from God, we can have no infallible proof that we are in the state of grace, and 'man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love, or hatred,'⁴ yet, He who feels an ardent desire to please God, says a father of the church, may confidently hope that God is pleased with him.

SECTION II.

To strive to improve daily in the service of God.

'THE path of the just, as a shining light,' says the Holy Ghost, in the book of proverbs, 'goeth forwards, and increaseth even to perfect day;'⁵ but 'the way of the wicked is darksome: they know not where they fall.'⁶ They stumble, every step they take; and their blindness is so great, their infatuation so deplorable, that they do not perceive their faults, and, of course, feel no remorse for them. The way of the tepid and negligent, may be compared to the evening twilight, which, decreasing every moment, at length disappears, and leaves us in the darkness of night. Judging of sin, by the false notions which they have imbibed, they either see no harm in the most dangerous

1 Heb. vi. 7, 8.

3 Ps. xxxiii. 9.

5 Prov. iv. 18.

2 Eccl. xxiv. 29.

4 Eccl. ix. 1.

6 Prov. iv. 19.

things, or consider them only as venial sins, and mere imperfections.

It is a maxim among the masters of a spiritual life, that, in the way of God, we certainly go back, if we do not advance. We cannot, says St. Austin, prevent ourselves from descending, but by always striving to ascend; for as soon as we begin to stop, we descend. Not to advance is to go back; so that, if we wish not to go back, we must always run forward without stopping. St. Gregory, St. Chrysostom, St. Leo, and many other saints, say the same, and express themselves, almost in the same terms. But St. Bernard enlarges on this subject, in the following dialogue: Well! will you not advance?—No.—Why not? will you go back?—By no means.—What will you do then?—I will remain as I am, and be neither better, nor worse.—Then, you will do what is impossible. Immutability is a privilege appertaining to God alone, ‘with whom there is no change, nor shadow of vicissitude.’¹—‘I am the Lord,’ says he, ‘and I change not.’² But all things, in this world, are subject to a perpetual change. ‘All of them shall grow old like a garment,’ says the royal psalmist, ‘and as a vesture, thou shalt change them; but thou art always the self-same, and thy years shall not fail.’³ Man, particularly, is liable to change and vicissitude: ‘He fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state.’⁴ In the road to perfection, continues St. Bernard, there is no medium, between advancing and going back. The pious are aware of this truth;—they never say, ‘it is enough.’

St. Gregory says that the true servants of God are like persons swimming across a rapid river, who, unless they incessantly bear up against the current, run great risk of being carried down. The course of life which they have adopted, is so contrary to the bent of corrupt nature, that if they do not continually urge themselves forward, they will

infallibly be hurried back, by the impetuous torrent of their passions. Again, as sailors dread nothing so much as a calm, because then they consume their provisions, and may afterwards find themselves in want of the necessaries of life; so there is nothing more to be dreaded, by those who navigate the tempestuous sea of this world, than a dangerous apathy, which stops them in their course towards heaven. The few virtues which they possess, soon prove inadequate to their spiritual wants, amid the various temptations which assail them on all sides, and they at last find themselves destitute of every help, and in an eminent danger of losing their souls. Wo to such as are surprised by a calm so dangerous! ‘You did *once* run well,’ says the Apostle, ‘who hindered you, that you should not obey the truth?’¹ You went, at first, in full sail—what calm, or sand-bank has stopped you? Perhaps you fancy you have done enough, and think yourselves entitled to repose. But reflect, and consider well, that you have still a great way to go. Be persuaded that circumstances may occur, in which you will have need of more humility, more patience and fortitude, than you have hitherto had occasion to practise; and that you may find yourselves unprovided, at the time of your greatest danger—‘He that is just, let him be justified still; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still.’²

SECTION III.

To forget the good we have done, and look to what we have still to do.

ST. JEROM, writing on these words of our Lord, ‘blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice,’ remarks that we are taught thereby never to think we are just enough, but always to aspire to greater perfection; and that a

1 Gal. v. 7.

2 Apoc. xxii. 11.

most efficacious means to do so, is, to forget the good we have done, and to look to what we have actually to do. Happy the man, he says, who does not depend on what he did yesterday, but who considers what he has to do to-day! This means is strongly recommended by all the saints, and was used by St. Paul himself: 'Brethren,' he writes to the Philippians,¹ 'I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I pursue towards the mark, for the prize of the supernal vocation of God, in Christ Jesus.'

Thus, two things are to be done. In the first place, we ought not to rely upon the laudable actions we have performed, the virtues we have practised, or the good habits we may have acquired; but, on the contrary, we should endeavor to forget them. This is important; for the view of our improvement naturally inspires us with pride, esteem for ourselves, and contempt for others; it causes us to become remiss, careless, and negligent. It leads to the evil mentioned above;—satisfied with the progress we have made, we cease to aim at a higher degree of perfection;—we say, 'it is enough,' and we are lost. 'Thou sayest, I am rich, I have need of nothing,—and thou knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind.'²

The next thing we have to do, after the example of St. Paul, is, to think seriously on what we are deficient in, to look forward, and see what God still requires of us. The man, says St. Gregory, who owes a thousand crowns, is not satisfied with having paid one or two hundred, but he makes every exertion in his power, to cancel the whole debt: so, in like manner, we ought never to think that we have done enough, as long as there remains any thing undone; but bearing in mind what we owe to God, the claims of his justice and the requisitions of his grace, we should

1 Philip. iii. 13. 14.

2 Apoc. iii. 17.

constantly endeavor to comply with them. Nor are we to fear lest opportunities might be wanting to us, in the pursuit of this generous undertaking. Our heavenly Father who wishes us 'to be perfect, as also he is perfect,'¹ will place within our reach all the means necessary to accomplish it. Let us only take care to make good use of them. Never lose any degree of perfection, says, St. Ignatius, which, by the mercy of God, it is in your power to attain. Avail yourself of every circumstance which may enable you to practise acts of some virtue,—of patience in afflictions, humility in humiliations, mortification in privations and disappointments.

By this fidelity to make use of all the means of salvation which the Lord gives us, and the help of fervent prayer, we shall obtain the most important of all graces; that without which, all the others are ultimately of no avail,—the grace of perseverance.

Many begin well, says St. Jerom, but few end well. Thus, we read in holy scripture,² that there went out of Egypt about six hundred thousand, besides women and children, and that two persons only entered the land of promise. It will avail us nothing to have begun well, unless we also end well. In Christians, we consider not how they begin, but how they end. St. Paul began ill, but ended well; Judas began well, but ended ill. What did it avail the latter to have been an apostle of Jesus Christ, and wrought miracles? It is to perseverance only, that the crown is promised: 'He that shall persevere to the end,' says the Son of God, 'shall be saved.'³ Jacob saw Almighty God, not at the foot, nor in the middle, but at the top of the ladder,—to teach us, that it is not enough to begin well, nor even to continue to do well for a time, but, that we must hold on, and persevere to the end. What does it avail, says St. Bernard, to follow Jesus Christ, unless we overtake him at last? St. Paul bids us 'run so, that we

may gain the prize.'¹ Thy race, O Christian! and thy progress in virtue ought to have no other bounds, than those which Christ prescribed to himself. He rendered himself obedient 'even unto death.' In vain, therefore, do we run, unless we continue to the last moment of our life. Without this, we shall never obtain the crown.

SECTION IV.

To aim at what is most perfect.

'BE zealous for the better gifts—I yet show you a more excellent way.'² Our spiritual advancement will be greatly promoted by always aiming at what is most perfect. Even the performance of our most indispensable duties will derive, from this habitual aspiration to perfection, that degree of goodness, without which it would cease to be meritorious. We are naturally so weak, and so much enfeebled by evil habits, that to attain an ordinary degree of virtue, our thoughts and desires should rise much higher. He who barely wishes to avoid mortal sin, will, soon or late, fall into it. But the man who firmly purposes, with the help of divine grace, to avoid venial sin and even the slightest imperfection, adopts a sure means never to become guilty of any grievous transgression. Thus, when the Almighty gave us his commandments, he placed the greatest and most comprehensive at the head of all the others, in order, that knowing, at once, the perfection to which we are called, and aspiring to it, in all our actions, we should perform them with as much purity of intention and fervor of devotion, as we are able, and strictly bound to acquire.

We often find persons who do not entirely neglect the care of their salvation, but who are unwilling to embrace

¹ 1 Cor. vi. 24.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 31.

the practices, and subject themselves to the privations of a pious life. They say, that it is enough for them to live as most people do; that they have no desire to be religious; that if they be saved, it is all they wish. But, they are greatly mistaken. Whilst their language evinces a great want of zeal and piety, they flatter themselves with vain hopes, which, judging from their present disposition, are not likely to be realized. 'For,' says our Lord, 'many are called, but few are chosen;'¹ and again, 'wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who enter by it:'² whence it follows, that if they live as the many, they will not belong to the chosen few, but they will be led to destruction. They have no desire to be religious, and yet they wish to be saved!—therefore, they hope to be saved without being religious—but, that is impossible; because, 'narrow is the gate, and strait is the way, which leadeth to life.'³ The foolish virgins, whose lamps went out before the bridegroom came, and who had taken no oil with them, were excluded from the marriage feast.⁴ The slothful servant, who hid the talent he had received, and took no pains to improve it, was cast out into the exterior darkness.⁵

'Be you, therefore, perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.'⁶—'Be ye the followers of God, as his most dear children.'⁷ 'Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; when he shall appear, we shall be like to him; every man that hath this hope in him, sanctifieth himself, as he also is holy.'⁸ Look to Jesus Christ, 'who left you an example, that you should follow his steps.'⁹ 'He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk, even as he walked.'¹⁰

But, if so exalted a sanctity disconcerts you, look to the

1 Mat. xx. 16.

5 Mat. xxv. 14—30.

8 1 John iii. 2. .3.

2 Mat. vii. 13.

6 Mat. v. 48.

9 1 Pet. ii. 21.

3 Mat. vii. 14.

7 Eph. v. 1.

10 1 John ii. 6.

4 Mat. xxv. 1—12.

saints, who were as weak as you are, born in sin as you were, subject to passions, temptations, and evil inclinations, as you are. They fought against them constantly; they conquered, and obtained a crown of glory. The church proposes their examples to you, and celebrates their feasts, in order to encourage you to imitate them on earth, whilst they pray for you in heaven. Let me exhort you to read their lives, and observe the particular virtues in which each of them excelled—the strength of their faith, the fervor of their love, the constancy of their hope, their patience, their humility, their self-denial. They aspired to no other heaven, than that which you hope to obtain; they had no other means for obtaining it, than those which it is in your power to use. There is between you and them a similarity of vocation and assistance, on the part of God; let there be, on your part, a similar fidelity, a similar co-operation, and you too, ‘according to the measure of the gift of Christ,’¹ will become saints, that is, you will be admitted into the mansions of bliss, which, though ‘many,’² are to be occupied only by saints;—for ‘there shall not enter into them any thing defiled.’³

SECTION V.

Not to neglect little things.

‘HE that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little.’⁴ The doctrine contained in this text is of the utmost importance in a spiritual life. Great things carry with them their own recommendation, and we are exact to perform them with fidelity and diligence; but we generally neglect little things, which we are apt to think of no consequence. In this, however, we are greatly mistaken: one neglect leads to another; we insensibly lose that delicacy of conscience

1 Eph. iv. 7.

2 John xiv. 2.

3 Apoc. xxi. 27.

4 Eccl. xix. 1.

which dreaded the least fault, and become, at last, indifferent to every thing connected with our spiritual improvement. A knowledge of the human heart and of the force of habit, places this most important truth beyond the possibility of a doubt. None ever fell on a sudden into great sins, after having for a long time led a pious life. The descent from the summit of virtue to the depth of vice is seldom rapid. Cassian applies to this subject, a comparison taken from scripture. A house, he says, falls not to ruin all at once; but if by the negligence of the owner, the gutters are not kept in good repair, the rain will, gradually, rot the timber, penetrate the walls, dissolve the cement, undermine the foundation, and the whole edifice will, at last, come to the ground. 'By slothfulness, a building shall be brought down, and through weakness of hands, the rain shall drop through.'

From these and similar considerations, the fathers of the church have been led to conclude that small faults are, in some measure, more dangerous, and ought to be shunned with more care, than great sins. The devil, they remark, does not generally tempt those who serve God faithfully, to omit duties of importance: he begins with such as seem of little consequence, and thus insinuates himself, as it were little by little, into their souls. The little account we make of small faults, prevents us from using proper means to correct them; they increase in number and in magnitude; our efforts to resist them, are less frequent and energetic; and the evil, which at first appeared trifling, becomes, by our negligence and habitual relapses, almost incurable.

It matters not, says St. Austin, whether a ship be sent to the bottom by one great wave, or whether the water entering gradually through the chinks, sinks her at last. But when a vessel begins to leak, we must immediately pump the water out; so also must we, by vigilance, mortification, and prayer, continually endeavour to root out of our hearts every imperfection that may have found its way into it, and which, if neglected, might, soon or late, be our ruin.

We should also be extremely careful to neglect no opportunity of improving ourselves by the practice of such virtues, as circumstances may place within our reach, however little and apparently insignificant they may be. Our perseverance and progress, depend principally upon this fidelity. God is always pleased to pour his blessings in great abundance on him, who is faithful in all things; he does not confine them to that general assistance, which is never wanting in temptation, but he bestows on him special and efficacious graces, with the help of which, he always triumphs over the assaults of the enemy. Hence the maxim of the gospel: 'He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater.'¹ But if we are unfaithful in little things, it is much to be feared that God will refuse to us that peculiar assistance, for the want of which we shall run great risk of being overcome in things of great importance; for, in the language of scripture, 'He that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater.'² If we are not liberal towards God, but offer our gifts with a parsimonious hand, and act as if we were afraid of doing too much for him, we cannot expect that he will be liberal towards us, and lavish of graces, the abuse of which increases our guilt and heightens our transgressions.

'He who feareth God,' says the wise man, 'neglecteth nothing;'³ because he is aware that the slightest faults may lead, 'by little and little,' to great crimes; that, when wilful, they 'grieve the Holy Ghost;' and that, having an irreconcilable enemy, from whom we can expect neither peace nor truce, the only means to overcome him, is to secure the assistance of heaven by our fidelity in all things which are connected with our salvation, and have a tendency to promote our spiritual advancement.

1 Luke xvi. 10.

2 Luke xvi. 10.

3 Eccl. vii. 19.

SECTION VI.

To attend to particulars.

A GENERAL wish to save our souls and become religious, is laudable and necessary, but it does not suffice; we are to go further; to render it useful and efficacious, we should descend to particulars; and carefully examine whether there be nothing in our conduct repugnant to the calls of duty, the dictates of conscience, and the principles of our holy religion—whether we comply faithfully with what God demands of us, according to the peculiar dispositions of his providence in our regard, in a word—whether we ‘decline from evil and do good.’¹

‘The enlightened Christian,’ says Dr. Fletcher, ‘examines whatever he does, or proposes; whatever he thinks, or desires. Discussing, for example, the character of the ordinary transactions of life—he says to himself:—‘Is there nothing in this undertaking, that is wrong? nothing in this traffic, that is criminal? nothing in this attachment, that is dangerous? nothing in this conversation, that is uncharitable? nothing in this—?’ He views these things in a great variety of their bearings; adopting none of them until a well-founded conviction has removed every serious apprehension respecting their propriety. In like manner, in relation to his affections and desires, he proceeds with the same anxious caution. Aware, that self-love is apt to deceive, and that its decisions are for ever at variance with those of virtue,—he is very frequently interrogating his conscience, and asking it the awful question:—‘Is there here no passion? no bad propensity? no self-love, or partiality? nothing that religion blames, or that innocence condemns?’ In short, in every action, and occurrence; under every perplexity and doubt, the prudent Christian adopts this, as his leading maxim,—to consult always the rule of virtue, and *to do nothing, which he cannot reconcile with its dictates.*’

‘To this precaution, the pious Christian is careful to superadd this equally important principle,—*To do always that, which, besides being manifestly becoming, is also at the same time, most conducive to his sanctification.* It is the observance of this maxim, that finishes, what the foregoing had begun,—engages men *to do the will of the Father, that is in heaven*; and prepares them for bliss.’

It is said of Apelles, that, in whatsoever business he might be engaged, he never let a day pass without exercising himself in his own profession, by painting something or other. For this favorite art, he always would find out some time amidst his other employments; and to excuse himself from going into company, he used to say: ‘This day, I have not as yet drawn one stroke with my pencil.’ In like manner, let no day pass without making some advancement in virtue. Practise, daily, some act of mortification, and correct some fault you were accustomed to commit; examine your conscience, at noon, and if you perceive that you have done nothing in the morning conducive to your improvement—mortified yourself in nothing—performed no act of humility when occasions offered themselves, believe that you have lost so much time, and make a firm resolution not to let the remaining part of the day pass in the same manner; renew your examination, at night, with regard to the forenoon; and you will find it impossible to observe these rules, without making, in a short time, considerable progress in the way of perfection.

SECTION VII.

To commit no fault deliberately, and faithfully keep our good resolutions.

It is of the utmost importance, in order to attain perfection, never to commit any fault deliberately. There are two sorts of venial sins; one, into which the most pious

may fall, through frailty, ignorance, or inadvertence—although there is, generally, some negligence on their part. These faults should be to them a subject of humiliation rather than a cause of affliction; for God will not on that account abandon them, but, on the contrary, he will grant them new graces, and animate them with fresh courage, when, upon these occasions, they will have recourse to him with more humility and greater diffidence of themselves. There is another species of venial sins, into which they, who are cold and remiss in the service of God, fall, wilfully, and deliberately. These faults are a very great obstacle to the reception of those graces which God, in his infinite goodness, would have bestowed on us, if we had not committed them. They are also the cause why we find no comfort or satisfaction in prayer; and why God ceases to impart to us those spiritual consolations and favors, which he was accustomed to bestow. So that, if we desire to advance in christian perfection, we must be very careful never to commit a wilful, or deliberate fault. Those we daily commit, through ignorance or inadvertence, are but too many, without adding greater ones to them.

One of the principal obstacles to the reception of God's graces, is our not putting into execution the good resolutions, which we have already taken. The longer we delay making good use of the graces God has given us, the longer he defers giving us new ones; and the more we endeavour to put in practice the good resolutions which we have formed with his assistance, the more is he inclined to bestow on us his heavenly gifts. The parable of the nobleman,¹ who called his servants and divided his money amongst them, that they might trade during his absence, and who at his return appointed them governors of as many cities as they had gained talents, plainly shows us what we are to expect from Almighty God, if we make a good use of his gifts. This nobleman

was pleased to recompense the fidelity and industry of his servants, with great liberality; so God, if we make good use of the means he has given us to improve ourselves, will recompense our fidelity with new graces, and additional blessings. On the contrary, if we do not faithfully follow the impulse given to our souls by divine grace, we shall not only stop the course of the heavenly communications, by which they were enriched, but we shall be deprived of the gifts which had been given us, and severely punished for not having improved them.

SECTION VIII.

To be faithful to our spiritual exercises, to imitate the most virtuous, and show good example to all.

WE have already remarked, that a Christian should never stop in the pursuit of virtue. Let us also bear in mind, that in our spiritual career, we shall become more weary by halting, than by constantly advancing on our way. St. Ambrose says, that, as it is less difficult to preserve our innocence, than to repent truly, so it is much easier to persevere in the fervor of devotion, than to recover it, when we have once lost it. If our heart grows cold and begins to harden, we shall find it extremely difficult to warm, and soften it again.

Fidelity to our spiritual exercises and such religious practices as we have prescribed to ourselves, with the approbation of our director, is the ordinary, and sometimes, the indispensable preservative against this evil. Many, who had made considerable progress in virtue, have lost the zeal and piety which at first animated them, for not having attended faithfully to their habitual devotions;—for having neglected meditation, spiritual reading, the frequent reception of the sacraments, &c. Their piety diminished in

proportion to the frequency of their omissions, and it was extinct, when they became habitual. Those, on the contrary, who are faithful in the performance of their religious duties and devotional exercises, not only persevere, with ease, in the line of conduct which they have chosen to follow; but, acquiring new strength by their continued exertions, they find themselves able to accomplish what is most arduous in the great work of christian perfection. Thus the saying of the wise man, that 'the slothful hand hath wrought poverty, but the hand of the industrious getteth riches,'¹ is verified in these two sorts of persons.

Let us be very exact, says St. Basil, in giving to God the time allotted for spiritual exercises; and as whenever we have not been able to eat or sleep at the usual time, we are sure to make up for it afterwards; so, if we should be unavoidably prevented from saying our prayers or examining our conscience at the appointed hours, we ought to supply the omission, as soon as we possibly can.

There are persons who postpone, shorten, and sometimes omit entirely the spiritual exercises which they have been in the habit of performing, when they feel no actual or sensible devotion; falsely imagining that they could derive no benefit from them whilst their spirits are depressed, and a mournful gloom hangs over their minds. This is a dangerous illusion. Doubtless, when we experience no sensible devotion, we are less pleased with our ordinary exercises of piety, but God is not less pleased with us; and they will often prove more beneficial to our souls, and, in the end, the source of greater consolation, than those which we perform with ease and alacrity. Hence the advice of the apostle St. James: 'Is any of you sad?—Let him pray.'²

To consider attentively the lives of the most perfect, and propose them to ourselves as models for our imitation, is a practice greatly conducive to our spiritual advancement. As the bee extracts from every flower its most pure

and exquisite substance to make honey; so a religious, says St. Anthony, ought to observe every man in his community, and learn, from one modesty, from another silence, from a third fervor, from a fourth obedience and resignation; in a word, he ought to imitate what he finds most commendable in each. The same must be recommended to persons who live in the world; for although 'the charity of many hath grown cold,'¹ there still can be found, in every profession, examples of piety, and true devotion, worthy the imitation of the most zealous and fervent. This laudable disposition to look to the virtuous and pious, and endeavour to imitate them, would be both a cause of humility, a powerful stimulus to perfection, and a source of peace and happiness in society. Charillus, king of Lacedemon, being asked what sort of republic he considered to be the best: 'that,' said he, 'wherein the citizens strive, with commendable ambition, who shall be most virtuous.'

Men are much more affected by what they see, than by what they hear; to be convinced that a thing is practicable, they have only to see another do it. Every one is aware of the force of good example. The saints have understood, and felt its magic. St. Bernard declares that the sight of certain religious, who were remarkable for their zeal and charity, imparted joy and consolation to his soul; that the very thought of them, when they were absent, and even after their death, made such an impression upon him, as to draw tears from his eyes. 'The memory of Josias,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'is like the composition of a sweet smell, made by the art of a perfumer.'²

But whilst we endeavour to follow the footsteps of the most virtuous, let us also show good example to others, and edify them by our own conduct. 'Let your light,' says our divine Master, 'so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.'³ In the highest, as well as in the lowest class of

society, whether we associate with the pious, or are compelled to live among the wicked, let us have 'our conversation good, that, considering us by our good works, they may glorify God.'¹ Thus shall we be 'the good odour of Christ in them who are saved, and in them who perish.'²

SECTION IX.

To remember the zeal we experienced, at the beginning of our conversion, and reflect on the motives by which we were then animated.

AN ancient religious asking abbot Agatho, how he should behave himself, the good abbot answered him, that he should remember how he had behaved himself the first day he left the world, and was received into the convent; and continue to do still, as he had done then. In like manner, every one will do well, often to call to mind what his sentiments were, when he first resolved upon leading a christian life and forsaking his evil ways by a sincere conversion, and understood the necessity and happiness of serving God, and loving him above all things. Both the young and old, by taking a retrospective view of their past life, will, generally speaking, be able to recollect a time, when they were careful, perhaps fervent, in the discharge of their religious duties; when 'to shun evil and do good,' was the constant object of their zealous endeavors. Let them call to mind those happy days, and reflect, that the motives which urged them then, are no less cogent, at the present time; that virtue has not lost its attractions and its charms, nor vice its deformity and awful consequences—nor hell its fires, nor heaven its joys—nor God his claims upon them. By these considerations, they will be led to

experience a salutary shame at their present carelessness and indifference, and resolve to resume their former works, with such zeal and fervor as may secure their perseverance.

Not only will you find it useful thus to think on the zeal and devotion which you felt, when you first began to serve God; but you will also derive great benefit by acting, every day, as if you just began. By following this method, you will not be satisfied, merely with not having abated in that fervor, which you experienced, at first; but you will endeavour continually to increase it, by applying yourself, daily, to gain and lay up new treasures for heaven, as if hitherto you had gathered nothing.

Another means, which will assist us much in acquiring perfection, is that made use of by St. Bernard. Often calling to mind the grace of his vocation, he asked himself: Bernard, Bernard! for what purpose didst thou come hither? How appropriate this question would be to those, who, though they have not been called to live in a monastery, yet have once led a religious life!—who, ‘finding no repose,’ no peace, in the pleasures the world could afford, ‘entered the ways of life,’ and fixed their abode ‘in the inheritance of the Lord!’ One might ask himself, what were my intentions, when, after making a general confession of my past life, I forsook the paths of vice, and began to relish and practise virtue? Another will say: What had I in view, when I renounced that criminal course of iniquity, in which I was once involved? when I was reconciled to my enemies? when I restored ill-gotten goods? &c. A third will put himself the question: What did I mean, when, justly alarmed at the consideration of my daily neglects and habitual carelessness, I, at last, resolved upon devoting myself entirely, and without reserve to the service of my God?—was it not that I should persevere? and, by perseverance, obtain the crown of life?

Those who, through a peculiar mercy of God not granted

to many, have been converted to the true faith, will find in such interrogations a powerful stimulus to the practice of every christian virtue, and even to the highest degree of perfection. Why, a convert will ask himself, did I renounce the errors in which I had been educated, and profess truths, which I had been taught to regard as impositions and fables?—It was, doubtless, because I was convinced that this change was necessary; for ‘without faith it is impossible to please God;’¹ and ‘he that doth not believe is already judged.’² Out of the church, there was no salvation for me—I entered it. But, without piety and the love of God, I should not be saved, even within the pale of the church; therefore, I must ‘join with my faith, virtue; and with virtue, knowledge; and with knowledge, abstinence; and with abstinence, patience; and with patience, piety.’³ I must ‘labor the more, that by good works, I may make sure my vocation and election.’⁴

SECTION X.

To derive advantage from sermons, and other religious instructions.

THE sermons, and other religious instructions, which we have an opportunity to hear every Sunday, and sometimes oftener, are most efficient means to promote our spiritual advancement, and for the abuse of which we shall have to give a strict account to God. But to derive from them the benefit they are calculated to impart to our souls, let us take care, in the first place, not to go to hear a sermon, merely because it is part of a christian’s duty to do so; but with a true and earnest desire to improve thereby. St. Chrysostom remarks, that, as hunger is a sign of good

1 Heb. xi. 6.

2 John iii. 18.

3 2 Pet. i. 5. 6.

4 2 Pet. i. 10.

health, so an ardent desire to hear the word of God, is a proof of the soul's good disposition. On the contrary, to feel no relish for religious instructions, is a sure mark of our soul's being in a dangerous condition. 'He that is of God,' says our divine Master, 'heareth the words of God. You hear them not, because you are not of God.'¹

In the second place, to improve ourselves by the sermons we hear, we must not hear them with a spirit of curiosity—to observe the good language, the delivery, the graceful action, the beauty of the thoughts of the preacher. This disposition is the cause, why many profit so little by hearing sermons. We should attend to the substance of the discourse, the instructions, and important truths which it contains. Holy Scripture tells us, that when Esdras² read the law of God to the people of Israel, they were all so moved, that reflecting upon their past lives, and comparing their actions with that divine law, which ought to have been their rule, they wept bitterly. It is after this manner, we ought to hear sermons: with a wholesome and profitable confusion for our faults; comparing our lives with the doctrine we hear preached; examining the difference there is between what we are, and what we ought to be; considering how far we are from the perfection to which we are called.

The third disposition I wish to recommend, is, not to go to church with a view to hear something new, or extraordinary. The great truths of religion, the fundamental maxims of salvation, are adapted to all capacities: plain and convincing of themselves, they require no borrowed ornament to be pleasing and consoling; no effort of imagination, to be understood, and relished. The class of readers for whom this little work is principally intended, know them well enough; but they neglect to practise them; and therefore, their object in attending to religious instruc-

tions ought to be, to hear them again, to think and meditate on them, and make them the rule of their conduct. St. Austin remarks very judiciously, that the understanding is quick and ready, but the will is slow. Whence follows the necessity of dwelling often upon the same subject, until we have deeply impressed it upon our minds, and reduced it to practice.

In the fourth place, we should apply to ourselves what we hear. An ancient preacher, speaking on this subject, addressed himself to his congregation in the following language: 'You are like those whose employment is to carve at great men's tables, and help others, without taking any meat for themselves. When you hear me make this or that remark, you immediately say: An excellent reflection indeed, and very proper for such a one! this is quite adapted to one of my acquaintance! if such a one were here, oh! how it would suit him!—and, notwithstanding, after all this carving for others, you keep nothing for yourselves. I would have you all to be guests, and not mere carvers.' Coarse as this simile is, it conveys plainly an important truth, and is indeed applicable to many. 'A man of sense,' says the son of Sirach, 'will praise every wise word he shall hear, and will apply it to himself.'¹ Let us follow that rule, and take care not to be like those 'who see a mote in their brother's eye, and see not a beam in their own.'²

If there is nothing in a sermon that concerns you, at present, yet, neglect not to hoard it up in your mind, for the future; perhaps you will soon stand in need of it. By this means, you will turn every thing that you hear to your advantage; and you will derive a real benefit from it, either for your amendment, or your perfection.

In the fifth place, we ought to be convinced that the word of God being the spiritual food of the soul, we should endeavour to remember something in particular, every time

1 Eccl. xxi. 18.

2 Mat. vii. 3.

we hear it preached, and lay it up in our hearts, that we may derive from it strength and resolution, should the time come, when it will be necessary to put it in practice. 'The seed that fell on the good ground, are they who, in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word of God keep it—and bring forth fruit, in patience.'¹—'Thy words have I hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against thee.'²

After hearing sermons and other religious instructions, with these holy dispositions, let us finally have recourse to prayer, that we may obtain God's grace to keep, and fulfil our resolutions. Let us be 'doers of the word, and not hearers only—deceiving ourselves.'³ 'For, not the hearers of the law are just before God; but the doers of the law, shall be justified.'⁴

1 Luke viii. 15.

2 Ps. cxviii. 11.

3 James i. 22.

4 Rom. ii. 13.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE PERFECTION OF OUR ORDINARY ACTIONS.

SECTION I.

The importance of sanctifying our ordinary actions.

IT is not sufficient for our advancement and perfection, that we do good things, but we must do them well. St. Jerom understanding that St. Paulinus praised him for living in the place where our Saviour Jesus Christ accomplished the mysteries of our redemption, wrote thus to him: It is not to live in Jerusalem, but to live well in Jerusalem, which is worthy of praise. This answer became afterwards proverbial among the holy inhabitants of the desert, and showed them that neither the place, nor the habit, but purity and sanctity of life, make true Religious. In like manner, the reading of good books, prayer, works of mercy and charity, will not, of themselves, sanctify us. The good of which they are calculated and intended to be the source, depends upon the manner in which we apply ourselves to them. To pray with attention and devotion, to approach the sacraments with due preparation, to assist the poor, visit the sick, &c. through motives of charity, and without ostentation or pride; in other words, to do all these things well, is pleasing to God, and useful to us;—but the spiritual benefit which we derive from them, is commensurate to the purity of our intention, and the fervor of our devotion.

The Son of God tells us, in the parable of the sower, that the seed which was sown in good ground, brought forth thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold;¹ pointing out thereby three

different degrees of virtue, in those who serve God; that is, those who begin, those who have made some progress, and those who are arrived at perfection. Many are the Christians who, externally, do the same things, perform the same exercises of piety, and apply to the same good works; but what difference in the fruit they reap from them? In some, they produce a hundred-fold, because they perform them with great fervor, and a great purity of intention; and these are perfect. In others, they produce sixty; and these are they who have made some progress towards perfection, but who have not, as yet, reached its summit. Others again, reap but thirty for one, and these are beginners only, in God's service. Let every one see at which of these degrees he has arrived.—And God forbid that any should find themselves in the number of those of whom St. Paul says, that 'they build upon a good foundation with wood, hay, and stubble—to burn in the day of the Lord.'¹ Take care, therefore, not to do your duty out of human respect, to please men, or to gain their esteem; for it would be raising a building of wood and straw, to burn, at least in purgatory. But endeavour to perform all your actions with the greatest perfection and the purest intention, and thus, you will, as St. Paul speaks, erect a structure of 'gold, silver, and precious stones.'

Nor is it necessary that these actions should be great, extraordinary, or heroic: the most simple and ordinary of our duties, as Christians, and according to our state of life and profession, are to be the ground-work of our perfection. 'To sanctify your ordinary actions,' says Dr. Fletcher, 'seasoning whatever you are employed about, by a good intention, and infusing into it a spirit of religion, is a method, which, beyond any other, contributes to facilitate the attainment of perfection. However little the generality of mankind may think of this happy art, and little, of course, as

they cultivate it, yet is it, in reality, the grand secret of christian wisdom; the principal injunction of piety; the main source of the divine favor; and the great parent even of temporal satisfaction,—because it sweetens the discharge of every duty, and occupation.’

‘In the designs of God, not only are *your* ordinary actions intended to promote *your* salvation, but they are intended even to be its chief, if not its sole, foundation. Upon them it is, that your best hopes of heaven are grounded. They are the ‘talents’ intrusted to you, from whose discreet and prudent management you are to make your eternal fortunes. And then, too, it is a fact,—such is the divine goodness in accepting our little offerings,—that, in the series of your daily duties, there is not one occupation so insignificant; nor in the order of your actions, one action so mean and trifling, which, by the aid of a little piety, may not be rendered eminently pleasing to your heavenly Father; and useful consequently to your eternal interests. Even the very feelings and ideas, which pass so rapidly across the mind, become by the spirit of religion, important; and are ennobled into the principles of sanctification.’

‘Appealing to the example of the saints, what do you find, was the great principle of their sanctity? or what the means, which they considered the chief basis of their salvation? It was the sanctification of their ordinary occupations. Impressed deeply with the wise conviction, that every action, however in itself insignificant, might easily be rendered a seed of grace, and a source of happiness,—they were careful to let none of them pass away neglected. Did, then, any thing occur to them, that was afflicting? They bore it, in a spirit of resignation.—Aught arrive, that was humiliating? They received it, in a spirit of meekness.—Had they any thing to do that was difficult? They did it as an act of penance.—Any thing to accept that was pleasing? They accepted it with the feelings of gratitude. By these arts it

was,—these easy and simple arts,—much more than by any distinguished actions,—that the saints attained perfection. By their means, they culled grace from every accident, and event; became gradually strong in virtue; triumphed over the enemies of their salvation; and finally conquered heaven.’

These truths are, at once, a comfort and an encouragement to those Christians, who, by the mercy of God, are already regular in the observance of their duties: they may become perfect without doing any thing more than what they do; but, by doing it well; not merely through habit, and, as it were, mechanically. To them we may say, in the words of Moses to the Israelites: ‘The commandment, that I command thee, this day, is not above thee, nor far off from thee; but the word is very nigh unto thee,—that thou mayest do it.’¹ The Greeks, says St. Anthony, who devoted themselves to the study of wisdom, undertook long voyages, both by sea and land, underwent great labors and hardships, and exposed themselves to imminent dangers to attain it. But you, to acquire virtue, which is true wisdom, are not obliged to go far, nor risk your lives; you need not even go out of your own houses, for there you will find it; nay, ‘the kingdom of God is within you.’² Do well, what your duty requires of you: be humble, patient, charitable, resigned, &c. as circumstances present themselves to practise these virtues. Such is the perfection which God expects from you.

SECTION II.

Means to sanctify our ordinary actions.

THE first means which the saints employed, to sanctify their ordinary actions, was to do them purely for God, and in conformity to his holy will. The second was, to bear

1 Deut. xxx. 11.

2 Luke xvii. 21.

in mind that they did them in his presence; that he saw them, heard them, and knew the motives which prompted them to act. 'To him,' says Dr. Fletcher, 'by a pure intention, they referred whatever they did, or undertook: and they perfumed the offering by the incense of frequent prayer. Not an action so trifling that they did not consecrate in this manner. It was upon the principle of the obligation of consecrating all their actions thus, and of the benefit, which resulted from such consecration, that they endeavoured always to keep God before their eyes, and to walk attentively in his presence.' We shall resume this subject, and show the excellence and practice of this means of perfection, in the sequel.

Another means to do all our actions with all the perfection of which they are susceptible, is, to apply to each of them, as if it were the only one we had to do—to say our prayers, to read religious books, to study, to work, &c. as if we had nothing else to think of. To let nothing hurry us, nothing disturb us, in what we are doing; not to suffer one action to clash with another, but apply ourselves totally to what we are about. Thus, when we are at our prayers, let us not think of any thing else; not even of the duties of our profession or employment. Those thoughts, however good they may be, would then, tend only to divert our attention from God, and from what we are praying for. Let us not lose the peace of our soul, and even the necessary presence of mind, by vain, and dangerous apprehensions of evils, which perhaps, will never come: 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.'¹ The attention and application required to do well, what we are actually doing, are enough to engage all our thoughts, at that time, without anticipating that which must be done afterwards. This conduct is conformable to dictates of reason, and the pagans themselves recommend it: Let us do what we are about at present, says

Aristippus, without thinking of what is either past or to come. And Plutarch relates that whilst the priests were offering sacrifices to the gods, there was a person appointed to cry out to them, 'Do what you are doing.'

Happy, indeed, should we be, if we could so perfectly govern our imagination, that we never thought of any thing else than what we are actually employed about! But, unfortunately, such is not the case. When our whole attention should be taken up with what we are doing, a thousand thoughts present themselves, which divert our mind from it. Ill-timed uneasiness about the past and premature foresight into the future, often prevent us from bestowing on the performance of each of our duties all the care which is required to render it acceptable to God. Let us, therefore, do every thing with undivided attention, and in due time; guard, equally, against sloth and precipitation; and never let one occupation clash with, or encroach upon another.

A fourth means not only to sanctify our actions, but to direct us in the choice of them, is to think of death. Have always your last hour before your eyes, says St. Basil; when you rise in the morning, doubt whether you shall live till night; and when night comes, do not assure yourself that you shall live till the next morning. St. Bernard goes farther; he wishes us to pause before every action, and ask ourselves this question: Were I about to die, would I do this? How many dangerous and sinful actions should we avoid, and with what perfection should we perform those which duty prescribes, if we adopted these salutary practices! Thus, for instance, with how much care would we not prepare for confession and communion, if we thought that it was the last opportunity we should have to receive these sacraments! with what fervor and attention would we not say our prayers, if we knew that it was the last time given us to ask God's pardon for our sins, and implore his mercy! It is reported of a holy religious, that his superior

seeing him in great danger of death, acquainted him with it, and advised him to confess, as if he were presently to die: God be praised, said the sick man, lifting up his eyes and hands to heaven, for these thirty years I have always made my confession, as if I were to die the next moment. It is after this manner we ought to perform all our actions. If we remain faithful to this practice, death will never find us unprepared.

One of the best means to know whether we walk uprightly before God, is, to examine whether, in the condition we are in, and in the very action we are about, we should be willing to be surprised by death. If we find that, at this very moment, and in the very action we are doing, we should not fear death, let us be satisfied; and, relying on God's goodness, live happy and contented. But, if we should not wish to die in our present state and occupation, but should wish our death to be deferred for some time, till the things, which take up our thoughts at present and hinder us from our duty, are over,—let us consider this as an evident sign that we are not so solicitous as we ought to be about our spiritual advancement, and fear for our salvation. For, as Thomas-a-Kempis says, if we had a good conscience we would not fear death; because it is sin, and not death, which we ought to dread. Therefore, since we fear it so much, it is a sign that our conscience reproaches us with something, and that our accounts with God are not in a good state. A steward who has his accounts in good order, is anxious to give them up; but he, whose accounts are not in order, is always afraid lest they should be called for, and thinks of nothing but how to gain time and defer giving them up, as long as he can.

Let every one examine himself frequently on this point; and, if he finds he is not in the state in which he would wish to be when he comes to die, let him do what he would wish then to have done. Remembering that happy is he,

who is such during his life, as he desires to be at the hour of his death.

It is true we may repent before we die, and be converted; but, He who has promised pardon, says St. Gregory, to those that repent, has not promised a next day for repentance, to those who sin. We generally say that there is nothing more certain than death, and nothing more uncertain than the hour in which it will happen—‘Be ready, for at what hour you think not, the Son of Man will come.’¹ ‘The day of the Lord shall so come as a thief in the night—when they shall say, peace and security, then shall sudden destruction come upon them.’² The saints observe, that it is a very great mercy of God that the hour of death should be uncertain, to the end that we may always be prepared for it. The last day is unknown, says St. Austin, in order that we may be ready every day. Moreover, this uncertainty, as St. Bonaventure remarks, detaches us from temporal things; for, knowing that we may lose them, when we least expect it, we are not apt to set much value on them. ‘Thou fool!’ said the Lord to the rich covetous man, ‘this night, do they require thy soul of thee: and whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided?’

One of the temptations which the devil most commonly makes use of to deceive the greatest sinners, is, to hide from them these plain and awful truths, and to make them believe that they will have time for all—that, one day or other, they will mend their lives, and be reconciled with their Maker. And, not only they, but many who have not entirely given up the care of their salvation, are retarded in their progress towards christian perfection, by similar temptations: they remain careless in complying with their religious and spiritual duties, on the false pretence, that, at present, they are not able to discharge them so well as they fancy they will, at some future period. Those persons, because they

¹ Luke xii. 40.

² Thes. v. 2. 3.

³ Luke xii. 20.

have not the same opportunities of doing good, that they might have, do not improve those which they actually possess. Others, because they cannot do all that they would wish to do, are discouraged, and do nothing—Beware of this fatal temptation.

When St. Ignatius retired to Manresa, to live in the practice of continual penance, the devil presented this thought continually to his mind—Is it possible you should be able to lead so hard and painful a life during fifty or sixty years, which probably you have still to live? To overcome similar temptations, arising from the fear of not being able to persevere a long time in the pursuit of perfection, amid the many difficulties by which they are encompassed, some persons will find it extremely useful to look no further than the present day. This means will be calculated to prevent them from desponding, and being dismayed by the anticipation of future evils, which their pusillanimity unduly magnifies. It is well adapted to their weakness. Let them, in the morning, resolve to keep their resolutions till noon; at noon, renew them, till night; and so, by degrees, and little by little, they will become stronger, more firm, more generous. They will learn to use violence with themselves, and to govern their passions. God will reward their fidelity and renewed exertions, by more frequent and abundant communications of his grace: ‘he will teach their hands to fight, and their fingers to war,’¹ that they may obtain a complete victory over themselves and their evil inclinations.

I have said that this means was well adapted to the weakness of many. For, if we were strong, if we were fervent, if we truly loved God, it would not be necessary to proceed by degrees, and hide the labor and difficulty from ourselves; because a true servant of God is not terrified either

by the length of time, or the difficulty of things; but, in God's service, he thinks all time short, and the pain and labor which he undergoes, appear to him sweet and easy. He does not bind himself, says St. Bernard, for a year or some certain time, as a mercenary does; but he consecrates himself, forever, to God's service. By this generous consecration of himself, without reserve, and without limitation of time, the just man 'being made perfect in a short space, fulfils a long time.'¹ That is to say, as the same saint explains this text, he lives many years in a few days; because such is his love for God, and such his fervor in his service, that, if he should live a hundred thousand years, he would employ them all to love and serve him faithfully. Thus, the will which he has to do so, is as meritorious as if he actually did it; and God, who knows the bottom of his heart, the extent of his resolutions, and the greatness of his zeal, rewards him accordingly. St. Paul, by a particular revelation from Almighty God, was sure, that neither death, nor life,—nor things present, nor things to come,—would be able to separate him from the love of God.² That it will be so with regard to himself, by the help of divine grace, ought to be the hope of every good Christian.

1 Wis. iv. 13.

2 Rom. viii. 38.

CHAPTER IV.

ON PURITY OF INTENTION.

‘MAN seeth those things that appear,’ said God to Samuel, ‘but the Lord beholdeth the heart.’¹ The goodness and perfection of an action does not consist in the external act, but in the purity of intention with which it is performed. It is true, that the best intention, cannot justify us for doing what we know to be, in itself, an evil; and, the end does not, in that case, sanctify the means. But a holy intention gives value to such actions as are naturally indifferent, and enhances the merit of those which are good in themselves. So that, our actions will be more meritorious and perfect, in proportion as our intentions are more upright and pure.

An ancient father of the desert was used to stop a moment, at the beginning of every thing he did; and being asked, one day, what was the reason of his acting in this manner, he replied: I believe that our best actions have no merit in them, unless they are done for a good end; and therefore, before I do any thing I direct my intention to God, who ought to be the only end of all our actions; and it is upon this account, that I always pause a little, in the beginning of every thing I do.

SECTION I.

The greater glory of God is the end which we ought to propose to ourselvss in all our actions.

ONE of the things which St. Ignatius principally recommends and most frequently inculcates, in his 'Constitutions,' is, that we should always act with great purity of intention, seeking only, in every thing we do, the will of God and his glory. These words, *To the greater glory of God*, have been affixed to the images of this saint, as expressive of the peculiar character of his piety. In them, is comprised the whole history of his life—they were his device, his motto, his arms.

To be more explicit, on this important subject, I say that we ought in the first place, when we rise in the morning, to offer and consecrate to God all our thoughts, words, and actions for that day, and beg of him, that all may be to his honor and glory; to the end, that when vainglory presents itself to desire a part in them, we may answer it, with truth: You come too late, all is already disposed of.

But we ought not to be contented with this; we must also accustom ourselves, as much as we are able, never to begin any thing, without first referring it, actually, to God's greater glory. And as an architect lays no stone, without applying the rule and plumb; so, in every action we do, we ought to look to the will and greater glory of God, as to the infallible rules of our conduct.

Again, as a good workman does not content himself with making use of his rule and square once only, but often applies them, till the stone is fairly placed; so, it is not enough that we have offered our actions to God, in the beginning of each of them; but, whilst we are performing them, we ought to act in such a manner as, thereby, con-

tinually to offer them to him, saying: Lord! it is for thee, I do this—I do it, because thou hast commanded me, and because thou desirest to have it so.

Some masters of a spiritual life, make use of the following comparison to explain what we are to do, in order to raise our actions to a high degree of perfection. As mathematicians, say they, consider in bodies only the dimensions, abstract from the materials of which they are made; so, in like manner, the true servants of God should view in their actions nothing but the will of God, and do, with equal zeal and alacrity, whatever it requires of them, whether that be, in itself, pleasing or painful, important or insignificant. A Christian, says St. Basil, has only one thing in view in all his actions, and that is, the glory of God; hence, he adds, the apostle tells us, ‘whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do; do all things for the glory of God.’¹

If we accustom ourselves to do all things with this pure and noble intention, we shall soon become rich in good and meritorious works. For this is truly the philosopher’s stone, which changes iron and brass into gold; because, how mean soever any action may be of itself, it renders it precious.

From what we have said, it will be easily understood, how greatly mistaken those persons are, who ascribe the distractions which they have in their prayers, and the confused state of mind in which they live, to their external occupations; for, how troublesome and vexatious soever they may be, these occupations, when lawful and necessary, are the very means by which such persons are to contribute to the glory of God, and save their souls. The trouble and hurry of which they complain, are owing to a want of confidence in God and submission to his divine will, to the neglect of prayer, and of such reflections and meditations as are not incompatible with the most laborious occupations. No matter how busily employed we may be, we are still

able to raise our minds and hearts to God, 'to walk in his presence,' and thus, become perfect.

St. John Climacus relates that in a monastery near Alexandria, he found a cook who was, every day, to prepare meat for two hundred and thirty Religious, besides strangers; and yet, amidst all these exterior labors, he was always recollected in himself, and shed tears in abundance. The saint being much astonished at this, pressed him to tell how he was able to preserve so great a recollection of mind, and to obtain the gift of tears. I always imagine to myself, answered the brother, that it is God whom I serve, and not men; therefore, I believe that I ought not to allow myself any rest; and the sight of the material fire furnishes me with a continual fountain of tears, by setting continually before my eyes the violence of the fire of hell.

St. Jerom and St. Gregory remark that the inspired writers, speaking of those who lived in the manner we have described, say that 'full days' were found in them; that they died 'full of days.' Thus, the wise man tells us that the just, 'in a short space, fulfilled a long time.'¹ But, how can one live a long while, in a short time? I answer,—By taking care that his actions be wholly for God, and his days full of good works. To the true servants of God, every day is twenty-four hours—they suffer not one moment of this time to pass by, unprofitably. The day is always full and entire to them; because they employ it entirely in doing the will of God. The very hours of eating, recreating, and sleeping, are not lost for them; because, they spend them conformably to the divine will; referring them all to the glory of God. It is by these means that they live a long while, in a short time; and that a few days of life, make many years of merit.

On the contrary, those who have neglected to do good works may be said—no matter how old they may be when

they die—to have lived a short time. The wicked, and careless, who never prepare for death before it comes, are generally, then, sensible of this truth. They never will find time to think seriously, and effectually on their salvation; they put off their conversion from year to year, until, at last, a few days only, perhaps a few moments, are left to them to settle their eternal concerns; and when, at that awful crisis, they calculate the length of their lives, by the good which they may have done, how short they must appear!

Let us adopt this mode of reckoning our years, from our earliest youth; counting only those days which we have spent in the faithful observance of our duties to God, our neighbour, and ourselves: those days, in which we have lived as true and pious Christians ought; not only by shunning evil, but by doing all the good we could. By this means, whether we die young, or arrive at an advanced age, we shall always live long enough to acquire great merits before God, and obtain ‘the crown of life’ after our death.

Those whose vocation is to contribute to the spiritual advancement of others, or who, from motives of pure zeal, devote themselves to works of mercy, such as to instruct the ignorant, visit the sick, &c. ought to take a particular care to rectify their intention, and act purely for God. The fulfilling of his divine will is the principal object they should have in view. They should not suffer themselves to be disturbed by their want of success in their charitable, or zealous undertakings; but whatever may be the result of their exertions, they ought to be satisfied with having done their duty as well as they were able. One may ‘plant,’ another may ‘water,’ but God alone can ‘give the increase.’¹

By thus depending on God for the success of what we undertake, we shall not be apt to attribute to ourselves the

good we may do; but we shall refer it to him alone, who gave it. We shall not easily yield to the temptation of vain-glory; nor shall we be elated with pride, and the esteem of ourselves. We shall be thankful to God, who, notwithstanding our unworthiness, has vouchsafed to make use of us, as instruments of his mercy; and, at the same time, remain confident, that much more might have been effected, had we been more humble, more zealous and fervent, in doing the work intrusted to our care; and had we not, as it were, spoiled it by our many imperfections.

SECTION II.

Marks of purity of intention.

ST. GREGORY, speaking of those who are bound by the duties of their profession to work at the salvation of others, lays down a rule whereby they can readily judge whether they seek purely the glory of God, or have their own also in view. Take notice, says he, whether or not you feel the same joy when another preaches well, is numerously attended, and does much good, as if you had the same success yourself. For if you rejoice not as much, but on the contrary feel a sort of trouble and envy; it is an infallible sign that you do not purely seek the glory of God. This rule may be applied to every kind of good work we undertake in behalf our neighbor—particularly by persons who belong to charitable societies, or religious associations. We may say to them, in the language of St. James, ‘if you have bitter zeal, and there be contentions in your hearts—this is not the wisdom, descending from above; but earthly, sensual, diabolical.’¹ You are not zealous for the honor of God, but for your own; you wish to attract to yourselves that

esteem and reputation, which you perceive another has gained. For if you desired the glory of God, and not your own, you would be glad that others can do more, than you are able to do yourselves.

The true servants of God were actuated by these sentiments, and evinced them by their conduct. Moses having been desired by Josue to forbid Edad and Medad to prophecy, he told him with warmth and emotion: 'Why hast thou emulation for me? O! that all the people might prophecy, and that the Lord would give them his spirit?'¹ St. Paul having understood that some would preach the word of God 'out of envy and contention,' through ill-will towards him, wrote to the Philippians: 'What then? so that every way, whether by occasion, or by truth, Christ be preached; in this also I rejoyce.'² It is related that Father Avila, on hearing of the establishment of the Society of Jesus, by St. Ignatius, declared that this had been the object of his exertions, for many years, but that he had never been able to accomplish it. I was like a child, he added, who, being at the foot of a mountain, would endeavour to roll a heavy burden to the top of it, but who, by reason of his weakness, could not effect his purpose—at length there came a giant, who took up the same burden, and with all the ease imaginable carried it where he pleased. Thus, this holy man looked upon himself as a child, whilst he compared St. Ignatius to a giant; and the establishment of the Society gave him as much joy, as if he had been the founder of it himself; because, in this, he regarded only the glory of God, and the salvation of souls.

We can judge of the purity of our intention with regard to the desire of our own spiritual advancement, by a similar rule. If we are disturbed, and experience a secret displeasure, to see another more pious than we are, it is a proof that we do not seek the greater glory of God. For although

1 Numb. ix. 29.

2 Chap. i. 18.

we ought to feel a salutary shame, when others leave us far behind them in the way of perfection; yet, it does not follow that we are, on this account, to repine and be disquieted. On the contrary, whilst we should sincerely regret that we are so remiss and imperfect in the service of God; it ought to be a consolation to us, that there are other persons who serve him more faithfully than we do; and, who, by their zeal and fervor, contribute to his glory.

Another mark that we act purely for God, is a holy indifference about the nature of the good works in which we may be employed in conformity to the will of God, according as circumstances may require. For if we do not apply with equal zeal and alacrity to a pious undertaking for which we expect no great praise from others, and no gratification to our pride and self-love; it is a sign that we have ourselves in view, more than God.

SECTION III.

Means to acquire purity of intention, and its various degrees.

ST. IGNATIUS speaking of the motives which ought to guide us in the discharge of our duties, says: Let all our study be to have an upright intention, proposing to ourselves nothing else than to serve, and please God; and this, rather through love, and gratitude for the benefits we have received, than through fear of punishment, or hope of reward.

There are several ways of seeking, and serving God. To serve him through fear of punishment, is still to seek him. This fear is good, and a gift of God, which the royal prophet begged of him when he said, 'Pierce thou my flesh with thy fear; for I am afraid of thy judgments.'¹ Were our fear of punishment to be such, that we should be

actually willing to offend God, if there was no future punishment; it would, then, be criminal. But to make use of the consideration of the pains of hell, the fear of death and judgment, in order to excite ourselves the better to serve God and abstain from sin, is laudable. Hence the holy scriptures often present these awful truths to us in the most forcible language, and exhort us to meditate on them.¹

We also seek God, when we serve him for the recompense, which we hope to obtain after our death; and this motive is even preferable to that which is founded upon fear. These two great sanctions of God's laws—the fear of punishment, and the hope of reward—are to be considered as useful, and indeed, generally speaking, indispensable means, to urge us on to do good, and avoid evil.

There is however a third motive still more desirable, and truly perfect. It consists in seeking God, purely for himself; in serving him through love, on account of his infinite perfections; in a word, because he is God. We should take great care not to imitate the conduct of those servants, who have no love for their masters, and who in the discharge of their duties, look only to the reward which they are to receive. Christians ought to be led by nobler motives; they ought to consider God as a father, and serve him through love and affection. The dread of chastisement may compel the slave to act; the hireling may be stimulated by the recompense attached to his services; but,—let the children of God be prompted by the desire of pleasing their heavenly Father,—let the earnestness of their love, banish every sort of fear, save that of offending him, and extend its sweet and forcible influence to every one of their actions. If after having been thought worthy to do any thing for God, says St. Chrysostom, you seek another recompense, you certainly do not know how to appreciate the honor and blessing conferred upon you;—if you did, you would con-

1 Deut. xxxii. 29. Eccl. vii. 40.

sider yourself amply rewarded for what you may have done. Do not however imagine, adds this great saint, that your recompense in the next world will be less, because you had it not in view; on the contrary, it will be greater, for the very reason that you did not seek it. The more free our actions are from self-love, the more pure and meritorious will they be found at the day of judgment.

The saints distinguish three degrees of perfection, as regards purity of intention. The first is, to seek nothing but the glory of God; so that, in all our actions, we keep our minds detached from earthly things, fix our happiness in God alone, and confine our thoughts to the accomplishment of his holy will. He loves thee less than he ought, says St. Austin, who loves any thing with thee, O Lord! which he loves not for thee. She loved God truly and perfectly, who, in the midst of the pomp and glory of royal majesty, could say to him: 'Thou knowest, that thy handmaid hath never rejoiced, since I was brought hither unto this day, but in thee, O Lord! the God of Abraham.'¹

Those who have arrived at this degree of perfection, enjoy a most perfect tranquillity and peace of soul. Nothing disquiets or troubles them—they are not cast down by adversity, nor puffed up by prosperity. As they have chosen for themselves a happiness which depends not on events, they feel superior to their vicissitudes.

The second degree of perfection, to which purity of intention may be raised, is, not only to forget all things, but even to forget ourselves, and not to love ourselves but in God, and for God; so that, in all the gifts we receive from him, it is not the advantage we derive from them, but the accomplishment of his divine will in us, that constitutes our joy and happiness. It is thus, the saints love God in heaven. They rejoice more at the will of God being accomplished in them, than at the height of glory to which they are raised:

1 Esther xiv. 18.

they are so transformed in him and united to his divine will, that, amidst the ineffable delights of the celestial abodes, it is more for God's sake, than for their own, that they love the felicity which they possess.

St. Bernard speaks of a third degree of perfection of which purity of intention is susceptible, which I shall give in his own words: It consists, says he, in acting, not precisely to please God, but because God pleases us or is pleased with what we do. So that, thinking no more of ourselves than if we were not in the world, we look only to the contentment and satisfaction of God. But, alas! adds this great saint, the misfortune is that in this land of exile, I can never forget myself entirely: 'Unhappy man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'¹ 'When shall I come, and appear before the face of God?'² Although we cannot reach this high degree of perfection in this world, we still ought often to endeavour to have our eyes fixed on it; because, the nearer we approach it, the closer will be our union with God. This perfect union, says the same saint, is what our divine Redeemer asked for us when he said: 'I pray, that as thou, Father, and I are one; so they too, be one in us.' That is, that they love thee for thyself, and love themselves, only in thee. This is the end, consummation, and perfection of all things; the peace and joy of the Lord; the joy in the Holy Ghost, the calm, and repose of the blessed in heaven.

SECTION IV.

The nature and evil effects of vainglory.

THE peculiar character of the sin of vainglory, is, that it robs God of the glory which belongs to him alone, and of

1 Rom. vii. 24.

2 Ps. xli. 2.

which he is so jealous that he says, by his prophet, 'he will not give it to another.'¹ Yes, O Lord! says St. Austin, he who would be praised for thy gifts, and seeks not thy glory, but his own, in the good he does, is a robber;—he is like the devil himself.

In all the works of God there are two things,—utility, and glory:—the utility, he leaves entirely to men;—but he reserves all the glory to himself. 'The Lord hath made all things for himself,'² that is to say, for his glory; 'And has created all nations to praise and glorify his name.'³ When, therefore, we seek to obtain the esteem and praise of men, we pervert the order which God has established; and we do him an injury, by wishing to share in the praise and honor, which his creatures owe to him alone.

Moreover, what is the amount of all we can do, that we should be praised for it? And if we do any good, know we not that the will, the opportunity, and the means of doing it, come from God 'who worketh in us both to will, and to accomplish?'⁴ 'What hast thou,' asks St. Paul, 'that thou hast not received? and if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?'⁵ No;—we should rather blush at the good opinion we are apt to have of ourselves; and be ashamed to receive praise for any thing we do, when we reflect on what we owe to God, and how imperfect our best actions are—how often they are tainted with vanity, self-love, and other human motives.

The prejudice we receive from vainglory, is sufficiently explained to us in the gospel: 'Take heed that you do not your justice before men, that you may be seen by them; otherwise, you shall not have a reward from your Father, who is in heaven.'⁶ You wish to gain applause, esteem, and reputation—this is the motive that actuates you, it will also be your reward; you need not expect any other.

1 Isaias xlii. 8.

3 Deut. xxvi. 19.

5 1 Cor. iv. 7.

2 Prov. xvi. 4.

4 Philip ii. 13.

6 Mat. vi. 1.

'Amen, I say to you,' says Jesus Christ, speaking of such as act in this manner, 'they have received their reward.' They barter 'an eternal weight of glory' for a momentary gratification of pride, and self-love: they might have purchased the kingdom of heaven, and they gain nothing but the transient reward of human applause. What greater folly can be imagined, than to take a great deal of pains, and to perform many good actions, and yet to find our hands empty in the end? This is what the prophet Aggæus gives us to understand, when he says: 'Set your hearts to consider your ways. You have sowed much and brought in little:—you have clothed yourselves, but have not been warm; and he that hath earned wages, put them into a bag with holes.'¹ Behold what vainglory does: it puts all things in a bag full of holes—what enters at one end, goes out at the other. Since you take so much pains to do what is, in itself, right and commendable, why do it in such a manner as not to profit by it, but lose all the fruit of your labors?

Vainglory, says St. Basil, makes us lose much time and labor in the pursuit of good works, and, afterwards, deprives us of all the merit which we might acquire by them. As a pirate does not attack a vessel when it sails out of port to purchase goods, but waits till it returns home richly freighted; so vainglory, not only suffers us, but even prompts us to undertake good works, and, soon after, robs us of them all. It does worse;—it changes good into evil, virtue into vice, by the badness of the motives with which it causes us to act.

We read in the life of St. Pacomius, that one evening, as he was with some other ancient fathers, one of his religious brought two little mats, which he had made that day, and laid them close by the place where the saint was sitting, imagining that when he should see them, he would praise his diligence for having made two mats in one day, when

the rule obliged him to make only one. But St. Pacomius readily perceived that this was done through a spirit of vanity; and addressing the fathers who were with him, Behold, said he, heaving a deep sigh, what pains this dear brother has taken from morning till night, to offer afterwards all his labor to the devil, by preferring the esteem of men to the glory of God!

St. Gregory compares vainglory to a robber, who insinuates himself into the company of a traveller, pretends to go the same way he does, and, afterwards, robs and kills him. For my part, says this great saint, in his 'Morals,' when I examine my intention with regard to this work, it seems to me that I undertook it with no other desire, than to please God; but I find that when I am not sufficiently on my guard, a certain wish to please men too, urges me on whilst I am writing it, and that my labor is not so free from dust and chaff as it was in the beginning. A serious reflection on our conduct, will enable us to discover similar temptations in our best actions. Many, at first, apply to good works through motives of charity and zeal; but, afterwards, vanity mingles with these holy intentions; they begin to think of, and feel a desire to obtain, the applause and esteem of men. If they be disappointed in this, their charity cools, and their zeal abates;—they either, upon some pretext or other, relinquish what they had commenced with great ardor, or carry it on without energy, and through human respect.

The temptation of vainglory is so much the more to be dreaded as it attacks not only beginners in the service of God, but even those who have already made great advances in the way of perfection. St. Cyprian, speaking of the second temptation which the devil made use of against Jesus Christ, when he carried him to the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, 'If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself

down,'¹ remarks that the evil spirit imagined he could have the same success against him that he had formerly had against others, whom he had overcome by vainglory, when they could not be vanquished any other way. For the temptation of vanity and vainglory is sometimes the last resource left to the tempter, to cause the most virtuous to lose all the merit of their good works. It often happens that after a most prosperous voyage, a vessel is wrecked in the very haven; so, the most perfect, after having sailed prosperously throughout the whole course of their life, and withstood courageously all the storms and tempests the devil raised against them,—when they come in sight of the harbour, full of confidence in past victories, and believe themselves out of all danger,—often suffer a miserable shipwreck, by their pride and vanity. Hence some call vainglory 'a storm in the harbour.'

But if this temptation is so formidable, when it attacks those who by a long practice of self-denial and christian mortification, have learned to subdue their passions; how much should they dread it, who have but lately begun the great work of their salvation! who, having frequent cause to be humble, do still permit themselves to be puffed up with pride for something or other that may be commendable in them! This is a very great abuse. One fault alone, ought to be sufficient to humble and confound us; and yet,—the many sins which we daily commit, do not inspire us with humble thoughts;—whilst the least good quality which we think we possess, is sufficient to fill us with pride.

1 Mat. iv. 6.

SECTION V.

Remedies against vainglory.

AN excellent and necessary remedy against vainglory is, to form a just estimate of the opinion of men; to know, that it makes us neither better nor worse than we are; that, as it does not lessen our faults, so it adds nothing to our good qualities. St. Chrysostom, in his comments on these words of the psalmist, 'Thou wilt bless the just,'¹ says: This holy king teaches us thereby to condemn the calumnies, and censure of men. They may speak against us, they may persecute us; but, they can do us no harm, as long as we enjoy the friendship and blessing of God. On the contrary, if God does not bless us, of what benefit can praise and applause be to our souls? Look to Job, he adds, sitting upon a dunghill, covered all over with leprosy, ulcers and worms, persecuted and scoffed at by his friends;—he was happy in this state, because God blessed him, and gave him this testimony, that he was 'a man upright, avoiding evil, and persevering in his innocence.'² Therefore, he concludes, in all your actions, secure to yourself the approbation of God; and, regardless of the opinion of men, persevere in the line of conduct, which duty and religion prescribe. 'As to me,' says St. Paul, 'it is a thing of the least account, to be judged by you, or by human judgment.—He that judgeth me is God.'³

A second means, which will help us much to shun the temptation of vainglory, is, to take great care never to use any expression in praise of ourselves. Never mention any thing of yourself that may redound to your praise, says St. Bernard; but on the contrary, hide your good qualities with more care, than others employ to hide their faults and imperfections. In fact, there is something so shocking and

1 Ps. v. 13.

2 Job ii. 3.

3 1 Cor. iv. 3. 4.

disgusting in a man praising himself, that the propriety of the old adage, 'self-praise is no praise,' is felt by every body.

The third means to guard against vainglory is, not to content ourselves with abstaining from what may tend to our praise; but even to hide, as much as we possibly can, the good actions we perform, according to the precept of Christ: 'Take heed that you do not your justice before men, that you may be seen by them—When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know, what thy right hand doeth—When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret.'¹ The true servant of God, says St. Gregory, esteems the good he does as nothing, when he cannot hide it from the eyes of men; and he believes he has already received his reward, if he adds not other good works, which cannot come to their knowledge. St. Jerom relates of St. Hilarion, that perceiving the concourse of people that followed him and the reputation his miracles attracted, he wept bitterly; and his disciples asking him what was the cause of his tears: Methinks, said he, when I see the esteem which men have for me, that God pays me in this life, for the little I do for him. Let us, then, not only guard against coveting, but even be afraid to obtain the esteem of men, lest God should confine to this, all the recompense of our labors.

But, as we cannot always hide our good works, and we are obliged to contribute, by our example, to the edification of our neighbor—what we have to do, is to purify our intention, in the beginning of our actions, offering them all to God; so that, when vainglory comes to claim a share in them, we may say to it, according to the advice of Father Avila, You came too late, all is already given to God. We read in the life of St. Bernard, that a thought of vainglory having come to his mind whilst he was preaching, he

banished it, saying, I did not begin my discourse for your sake; nor will I leave it off on your account. Let not, then, the fear of vainglory make us desist from doing good; but let us merely be deaf to its suggestions, and disregard the praises of men. We ought to behave towards the world, says St. Chrysostom, as we would towards a child, that knows not what it says, nor what it does. Whether it appears pleased, or shows itself dissatisfied, let it all be the same to us.

The knowledge of ourselves affords a most efficacious remedy against the temptation of vainglory; a remedy which alone will effect a cure, when others have failed, and without which they are all inefficient. If we knew ourselves well, says St. Francis Xavierius, and what we truly are in the sight of God, we should look upon the praises of men, as so many insults and raileries. We forget our passed, and our daily sins, when we yield to the temptation of vainglory. Were we only seriously to reflect on the imperfections which are discernible in our best actions, we should find sufficient cause to be humble; and, instead of rejoicing in the praises which we may receive on their account, we would dread the judgment of God with regard to them. After the example of holy Job, far from taking a vain complacency in the imaginary perfection of our ways, we would 'fear all our works.'¹

1 Job ix. 28.

CHAPTER V.

ON PRAYER.

SECTION I.

The excellence and facility of prayer.

HOLY SCRIPTURE gives us a sublime idea of prayer, in the various comparisons which it uses to describe its excellence and efficacy. 'Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight, and the lifting up of my hands, as evening sacrifice.'¹ 'The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds—and he will not depart till the Most High behold.'² 'The four and twenty ancients fell down before the Lamb,' says St. John, 'having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints.'³ Again: 'And another angel came, and stood before the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given to him much incense, that he should offer of the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which is before the throne of God. And the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God, from the hand of the angel.'⁴

The angels are always near the servants of God to defend them against the snares of the devil, and deliver them from danger: 'He hath given his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy way:'⁵ 'The angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear him, and shall deliver them.'⁶ But they favor us more particularly with their presence and protection, remarks St. Bernard, when we are at our

1 Ps. cxl. 2.

2 Eccl. xxxv. 21.

3 Apoc. v. 8.

4 Apoc. viii. 3. 4.

5 Ps. cix. 11.

6 Ps. xxxiii. 8.

prayers: and he supports this assertion by several texts from scripture. Take these two: 'I will sing praise to thee, in the sight of the angels.'¹ 'When thou didst pray with tears,' said the angel to Tobias, 'I offered thy prayers to the Lord.'² The angels, says St. Hilary, preside at the prayers of the faithful, and daily offer them to God.

St. Chrysostom writes thus, on the excellence and efficacy of prayer: Consider what a happiness and glory it is for you, to be allowed to speak with God, to desire what you please, and ask what you desire. How valuable this intercourse, between God and man! no tongue is able to enumerate the many advantages which we can derive from it. If our minds and hearts are improved in the company of the wise and virtuous, what blessings are we not to expect from frequent communications with God, in fervent prayers? 'Come ye to him,' says the royal prophet, 'and be enlightened—O taste! and see that the Lord is sweet.'³ By frequently communing with the divine goodness, the heart of man is enlarged, his affections are purified, and rising above all created objects, his 'conversation is in heaven.' What is more excellent than prayer? says St. Austin, what more profitable in this life? what more sweet to the mind? what more sublime in religion? St. Gregory of Nice, is of the same opinion: Of all things that are esteemed and valued in this life, he says, none are to be preferred to prayer.

The saints who understood the excellence of prayer, gave incessant thanks to God, who rendered its practice so easy, that it is in every one's power to apply to it at all times, and in all places: 'Prayer to the God of my life, is with me,'⁴ says the psalmist—'I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise shall be always in my mouth.'⁵—'O God! my God, to thee do I watch at the break of day—in a deser

1 Ps. cxxxvii. 2.

3 Ps. xxxiii. 6. 9.

5 Ps. xxxiii. 2.

2 Tob. xii. 12.

4 Ps. xli. 9.

land, and where there is no way, and no water; so in the sanctuary, have I come before thee—Thus will I bless thee, all my life long.’¹ The Lord is always willing, always ready, to hear and help us: ‘The Lord is nigh unto them that call upon him; he will do the will of them that fear him; and he will hear their prayers, and save them.’² The most wealthy and generous among men, are sometimes unable to assist their fellow-creatures; because, how great soever their means may be, yet they are diminished, and can at last be exhausted, by their liberality to many. But ‘the Lord,’ says St. Paul, ‘is rich to all that call upon him.’³ The invitation, not to say the precept, is general and unlimited: ‘Ask, and you shall receive.’⁴—‘Evening, and morning, and at noon,’ says the royal prophet, ‘I will speak and declare (my wants); and he shall hear my voice.’⁵ Let us, therefore, with sentiments of the most lively gratitude to God, humbly and incessantly avail ourselves of so efficacious a means as prayer is, to obtain his blessings and his graces. Let us rest assured, as St. Austin remarks on these words of the psalmist, ‘Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me,’⁶—that if the Lord does not deprive us of the spirit of prayer, he will never withdraw his mercy from us; and, in order that his mercy may not forsake us, let us never abandon the practice of prayer.

SECTION II.

Necessity and efficacy of prayer.

WE have but too much experience of the necessity of prayer; and would to God that this experience were less frequent than it is! Man being subject to so many frailties,

1 Ps. lxii. 2. 3. 5.
2 Ps. cxliv. 18. 19.

3 Rom. x. 12.
4 John xvi. 24.

5 Ps. xlv. 18.
6 Ps. lxv. 20.

finding himself encompassed by so many enemies, and standing in need of so many things, both for soul and body, should have continual recourse to God, and implore his assistance; often saying in the words of king Josaphat, when the Ammonites and Moabites had united against him, 'O God! we have not strength enough to be able to resist— But as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to thee.'¹ I know not, says Pope Celestine, speaking of the importance of prayer, how to say any thing better to you upon this subject, than what Zosimus, my predecessor, told you. When is it, said he, that we stand not in need of the divine assistance? On all occasions, therefore, let us have recourse to God; for it would be insufferable pride in man, to presume that he can do any thing of himself.

St. Thomas, to prove the necessity of prayer, lays down this principle, that what God has, from all eternity, determined to give us for the benefit of our souls, he gives, in time, by means of prayer. For, as it is the order and disposition of divine Providence that the earth should become fruitful, by the care which is taken to cultivate it; so it is the order and disposition of the same Providence, that souls should obtain many graces and lights, by means of prayer. Christ says in the gospel: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be open to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.'² Prayer is therefore the channel through which God communicates his favors, assists us in our necessities, and enriches us with his treasures. Some compare it to a golden chain, which unites heaven and earth: by its means, the graces of God come down upon us, and we are raised up to him. We may say it is Jacob's ladder, by which angels continually ascend and descend, to carry our petitions to God and bring back his blessings to us. St. Austin calls

1 2 Paral. xx. 12.

2 Mat. vii. 7. 8.

it 'the key of heaven'—it opens the way to the mansions of bliss, and unlocks the treasures of divine mercy.

The necessity of prayer is evinced by the same arguments, that establish the necessity of grace. Without the grace of the Redeemer, we cannot work out our salvation; therefore, without prayer there is no salvation: because, faith teaches us, that—except the first grace which is not dependent on prayer—prayer is the efficacious and universal means whereby God wishes us to obtain all other graces. 'Ask, and it shall be given you;' this is the rule laid down by Jesus Christ. Hence it follows, says St. Thomas, that all confidence in God which is not founded on prayer, or, if I can use the expression, authorized by prayer, is vain, rash, and reprobated. The reason is, says the same saint, that God, who owes us nothing in justice, and who cannot possibly owe us any thing otherwise than in consequence of his mercy and fidelity to his promises, has bound himself by these two attributes, to give us his grace, on the express condition that we shall ask for it. Therefore, he can, without injustice, and consistently with his fidelity and mercy, withhold his graces from us, when we do not pray to him. Not only can he, but in the ordinary course of providence, he ought, in some manner, to withhold them; because, graces so valuable as his, remarks St. Chrysostom, graces which lead us to heaven, are at least well worth the trouble it may cost us to ask for them earnestly, and with perseverance.

Another consideration, which evidently shows the need we have of prayer, is, that it is a most efficacious means to regulate our conduct, and to surmount the obstacles which we meet with in the practice of virtue. He who knows how to pray, knows how to live, says St. Austin. St. Climacus relates that a faithful servant of God once told him that he knew, in the morning, how he should spend the day. When I have said my prayers well, he remarked, the rest

of the day corresponds to that good beginning; but when I acquit myself of that essential duty negligently, I feel disquieted in mind, during the whole day. Effects similar to that produced on this holy man, by neglects which his humility probably magnified, are often experienced by those who pay any attention to what passes in their own hearts. They generally find, that when they have faithfully performed their devotions in the morning, they enjoy throughout the day greater peace and tranquillity of mind; they discharge their other duties with more fidelity; they are more patient, charitable, and resigned. On the contrary, if they curtail, omit, or hurry over their morning exercises, they soon feel the sad effects of their negligence in this essential duty: they become less circumspect, less watchful, and their passions gain, at last, the ascendancy over their former resolutions. Well might they say, in the figurative language of the psalmist: 'We are smitten as grass, and our hearts are withered; because we forgot to eat our bread.'¹ For, as the body is supported by food, so the soul is nourished by meditation and prayer.

Abbot Nilus says that mental prayer ought to be our mirror, and that we should daily view ourselves in it to know our faults and the means of correcting them. Without the grace of prayer, says St. Francis, we cannot hope to be able to make any progress in the service of God. St. Thomas of Villanova affirms that prayer is to the soul, what natural heat is to the stomach. For as by means of this heat, the food we take is converted into a nourishing juice, which imparts vigor and health to our bodies; so in like manner, meditation and prayer enable us to turn every thing to the spiritual advantage of our souls: they are means by which, 'to them that love God, all things work together unto good.'² Again, as animal life must cease, when this vital heat exists no more; so, the spiritual life of our souls cannot subsist without prayer.

1 Ps. ci. 5.

2 Rom. viii. 28.

SECTION III.

Mental prayer.

WHAT I have said in the foregoing sections, is applicable to prayer, in general, whether vocal or mental: I shall, now, treat of mental prayer, of which St. Paul speaks, when he says: 'I will pray in the spirit, I will pray also in the understanding; I will sing with the spirit, I will sing also with the understanding.'¹

There are two sorts of mental prayer: the one is ordinary and easy; the other, extraordinary and sublime. The first can, in some measure, be taught, but the second cannot; for we do not so much form it in ourselves, as the Holy Ghost forms it in us. Thus we read that St. Anthony, having gone to his prayers in the evening, often continued them till the next morning, and then, complained that the sun rose too early, and deprived him of the heavenly lights, which the Lord imparted to him. This sort of mental prayer, is a particular gift of God, which he communicates to whom he pleases. Sometimes, it is true, he bestows it as a recompense for what we have done, or suffered for him; but sometimes it is entirely gratuitous, and has no reference to our past conduct.

These two sorts of prayers are clearly denoted in the holy scripture. Speaking of the first, or ordinary mental prayer, it says that the just man 'will give his heart to resort early to the Lord, that made him; and he will pray in the sight of the Most High.'² It mentions the morning, as a time most proper for prayer; and we infer the same, from several other texts: 'O Lord! in the morning thou shalt hear my voice; in the morning I will stand before thee.'³ 'I will extol thy mercy in the morning.'⁴ 'I prevented the dawning of the day, and cried—my eyes to thee, have pre-

1 1 Cor. xiv. 15. 2 Eccl. xxxix. 6. 3 Ps. v. 4. 5. 4 Ps. lxviii. 17.

vented the morning; that I might meditate on thy words.’¹ Remark also, that the just man ‘will give his heart to resort to the Lord;’ for prayer comes from the heart, and if words are uttered, it is to express its sentiments, and affections: he prays ‘in the sight of the Most High,’—deeply impressed with an awful sense of his presence. But after having thus ‘prepared his soul before prayer,’² what is it that the just man asks for? ‘He will open his mouth in prayer,’ adds the sacred text, ‘and make supplication for his sins.’³ This is properly the prayer we should offer—to weep over our past sins, and implore the mercy of God. It is not enough to have confessed them, and endeavoured to atone for them. We ought still to bear them in mind, that we may be more humble, watch over ourselves with greater diligence, and be more grateful to God, who so often forgave us. ‘Wash me yet more from my iniquity—for my sin is always before me,’⁴ was the prayer of David, after he had been assured of his pardon by the prophet Nathan. ‘Be not without fear for sin forgiven,’ says Ecclesiasticus.⁵

The same inspired writer alludes to the second, or extraordinary sort of mental prayer, when he says, ‘If it shall please the great Lord, he will fill him with the spirit of understanding.’⁶ He says, ‘If it shall please the great Lord;’ for it is a favor to which we have no right, a gift of his liberality. Therefore, ‘if it pleases the Lord,’ a light from above will flash upon your mind, whilst you are at your prayers, and you will then fully understand, without any effort of reason or imagination, what you could not conceive before.

But, sublime as this sort of mental prayer is, we ought not to endeavour to raise ourselves to it, by our own exertions; nor should we hastily imagine that God has called us to its perfection. May the Lord grant, says the pious

1 Ps. cxviii. 147. 148.

3 Eccl. xxxix. 7.

5 Chap. v. 5.

2 Eccl. xviii. 23.

4 Ps. l. 5.

6 Eccl. xxxix. 8.

St. Bernard, that I may enjoy peace of soul, the sweetness and repose of a good conscience, the spirit of mercy, simplicity, charity towards my neighbour, the gift of rejoicing with them that rejoice, and of weeping with them that weep! I desire nothing else: 'the high hills are a refuge for the harts; the rock, for the urchins.'¹ Let therefore the lofty mountains of contemplation be the abode of those privileged souls, who, with more than ordinary facility, run towards perfection; as for me, who am covered with the thorns of my sins, I will retire into the holes of the corner-stone, which is Christ; I will hide myself in his wounds; I will wash my faults in his precious blood—and this shall be my prayer. If then, so great a saint as St. Bernard contented himself with the practice of virtue, and a lively sorrow for his sins; let us be satisfied to follow his example; let us have recourse to prayer, that we may obtain God's grace, bewail our sins, mortify our passions, extirpate our evil habits, and surmount every obstacle that might retard our progress towards perfection.

To arrive at the sublimity of contemplation, we must begin to apply ourselves to the mortification of our passions, and lay a solid foundation of all christian and moral virtues. Many, neglecting to observe this method, and wishing to rise to contemplation, before they are called to it by the 'Father of lights,' find themselves, after many years of meditation and prayer, as void of virtue, impatient, proud, and unmortified, as they were when they began.

1 Ps. ciii. 18.

SECTION IV.

Ordinary mental prayer, or meditation—Its necessity, and advantages.

I. AFTER having thus briefly noticed the more sublime, or extraordinary sort of mental prayer, which, as I have already said, can neither be taught nor explained, but is a pure gift of God, which he bestows, when, and on whom he pleases, I shall now speak of ordinary mental prayer or meditation, which, with the help of divine grace, the advice of a spiritual director, and our own exertions, we are all able to learn, and practise.

Meditation comprises the exercise of the three powers of our soul—the memory, the understanding, and the will. In the first place, we are to represent to ourselves, by the help of memory, the subject upon which we intend to meditate; then, the understanding must be used, in order to examine and consider it attentively; lastly, the will is to produce the acts which the reflections of the understanding on the subject proposed to it by the memory, may suggest and elicit.

The exercise of the understanding is the source from which proceed the acts of the will, in mental prayer; for the will is a blind faculty, unable to incline towards any thing, unless the understanding guides it. No one, says St. Gregory, can love what he is entirely ignorant of. And as philosophers say: Nothing can be wished for, unless it be first known. Hence follows the necessity of performing well this part of mental prayer. Unless we reflect seriously on our own weakness, and evil inclinations, we shall be deceived as to our spiritual wants; and, when at prayer, we shall not be able to know what we should ask, nor shall we ask with proper fervor and eagerness. For want of this knowledge of our spiritual necessities, we shall be apt to dwell upon many things, during our prayers, which are of

no use to us, and neglect those which it would be necessary to consider, and earnestly to beg of Almighty God.

II. St. Bernard, speaking of the means of attaining perfection, says: No one becomes perfect on a sudden; it is by climbing, and not by flying, that we reach the top of the spiritual ladder. Let us therefore ascend, by meditation and prayer. Meditation will teach us what our wants are; prayer will supply them. The former will show us the way we should follow; the latter will lead us to it. Meditation will point out to us the dangers with which we are threatened; prayer will enable us to shun them, with the help of divine grace.

Meditation, says St. Austin, imparts knowledge, knowledge leads to compunction, compunction to devotion, and devotion perfects prayer. He calls it elsewhere, the source of all good. The pious Gerson styles it, the sister of spiritual reading, the nurse of prayer, the directress of good works, the perfection of all things—and affirms, that without a miracle, no one can reach the perfection of the christian religion, unless he applies himself to the practice of meditation.

St. Thomas of Aquin says that a religious, without meditation and prayer, is like a soldier without arms, on the day of battle. If so, what shall we think of those Christians, who range in the busy walks of life, and who are daily exposed to the temptations of a world ‘seated in wickedness?’¹ ‘Shall I say it?’ asks the pious and eloquent Bourdaloue, ‘and why should I hesitate, since it is not a paradox, but a certain and unquestionable truth? a hermit, and a religious, could do without meditation, more easily than a person who lives in the world. Because, in the solitude of the desert, and the obscurity of the cloister, they meet with fewer objects, to divert their thoughts from the care of their salvation; and moreover, they have, independently of medita-

tion, many other observances, to unite them to God, to remind them of his presence, and, in a thousand different ways, to bring to their recollection, and rivet upon their minds, the great truths of religion.'

'The pretexts which persons of the world allege to dispense themselves from the practice of meditation, are the very reasons why they should apply to it with more assiduity. 'You allege,' says the same excellent moralist, 'the bustle, the cares, the engagements, and the troubles of the world: all your time, you say, is so taken up in them that you can scarcely find leisure to recollect yourselves. Now, this is precisely the reason, why you have great need of meditation; lest this bustle of the world, should lead you into an entire forgetfulness of God, and of your duties to him; lest these cares of the world should, like so many thorns, choke in your heart the good seed of the word of God, and draw your attention from the care of your soul and spiritual improvement; lest these engagements of the world should become for you bonds of iniquity, and stumbling blocks to your virtue; lest these troubles of the world should disturb your mind, harden your heart, and cause you to lose all sentiments of piety'—'And do not tell me,' he adds, 'that you do not know how to meditate; for there is nothing to which you are more accustomed than to meditation. You know how to meditate upon your temporal affairs—upon an undertaking of any kind, in which your worldly interest, self-love, or ambition is concerned. That is to say, upon all these things, you know how to deliberate, examine, weigh the reasons, foresee the obstacles, and adopt the proper measures. In other words, you can think upon all these things, at all times, and in all places, without disgust, and without distraction. Are, then, the momentous concerns of your salvation the only ones, to which you cannot apply your minds? the only ones, on which meditation will appear to you impracticable?'

The necessity and advantages of meditation, are clearly evinced by numberless passages from holy scripture. Take the following:

‘Hear, O Israel!—These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt meditate upon them, sitting in thy house, and walking in thy journey.’¹

‘Blessed is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly—But his will is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he shall meditate day and night.

‘He shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth his fruit, in due season; and his leaf shall not fall off, and whatsoever he shall do, shall prosper.’²

‘In the days of my trouble I sought God—My soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God, and I was delighted. I thought upon the days of old; and I had in my mind the eternal years. And I meditated in the night with my own heart—will God forget to show mercy?—I will be mindful of thy wonders, and I will meditate on all thy works.’³

‘I have thought on my ways; and turned my feet into thy testimonies.’⁴

‘The cords of the wicked have encompassed me; but I have not forgotten thy law.’⁵

Finally, Ecclesiasticus assures us that if we reflect seriously on death, judgment, heaven, and hell, we shall never defile our souls by the stain of sin: ‘In all thy works, remember thy last end; and thou shalt never sin.’⁶

On the contrary, the prophet Jeremias assigns the neglect of meditation, as the cause of all the moral evils that overflow society: ‘With desolation,’ he says, ‘is all the land

1 Deut. vi. 6. 7.

2 Ps. i. 1. 2. 3.

3 Ps. lxxvi. 3—13.

4 Ps. cxviii. 59.

5 Ps. cxviii. 61.

6 Chap. vii. 40.

made desolate; because there is none that considereth in his heart.’¹

Meditation, as I have already remarked, is the source from which proceed the acts of the will; for man is a rational being, and his understanding must be convinced, before his will can be persuaded. One of the great objects which we should have in view, in meditation, and the first benefit we ought to derive from it, is, to be undeceived with regard to the errors of the world, to be confirmed in the belief of the truths of religion, and firmly to determine upon what we are to do, and what we are to avoid. But, in order that it may produce these salutary effects, it ought to be performed with attention, deliberation, and fervor.

Consider well the shortness of life, the frailty and vanity of all earthly things—and you will soon be detached from the world, estranged from its pleasures, and disenthralled from its allurements and temptations. Consider, with St. Paul, that ‘the time is short,’ that ‘the figure of this world passeth away;’² that ‘here, we have no permanent city, but seek one to come;’³ ‘look,’ with him, ‘not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen,’⁴—and you will learn, after his example, ‘to esteem all things but loss, for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, your Lord,’—you will be willing ‘to suffer the loss of all things, that you may gain him.’⁵ In like manner, reflect seriously, and leisurely on the other great truths, and mysteries of religion; treasure up in your minds the maxims contained in ‘the gospel of your salvation;’⁶ let them sink deeply into your hearts,—and you will soon feel true repentance for your sins, a sincere sorrow for your many imperfections, and an ardent desire for your spiritual advancement.

Meditation, next to the grace of God, is the cause of true devotion, that is to say, of that habitual disposition of the

1 Chap. xii. 11.

3 Heb. xiii. 14.

5 Philip. iii. 3.

2 1 Cor. vii. 29. 31.

4 2 Cor. iv. 18.

6 Eph. i. 13.

will, which prompts us, at all times, to do what may contribute to the glory of God, and the sanctification of our souls. Doubtless, this holy disposition is a gift of God; but, in the ordinary course of providence, it is to be obtained and improved by meditation. 'My heart grew hot within me,'¹ says the psalmist—this was the effect of God's grace—the primary cause of devotion. But, by what means did he hope to obtain an increase of this first grace? how was this first cause to operate?—by meditation: 'And, in my meditation,' he adds, 'a fire shall flame out.'

If your devotion is founded upon solid reflections and serious meditations, it will be lasting, and independent of circumstances. In every situation, and in every place, whatever may be your actual feelings, in times of spiritual darkness and aridity, you will still remain faithful to God, and persevere in his service. For although you may, sometimes, be deprived of spiritual consolation, and sensible devotion; yet, you will, generally, be able to recollect the motives on which you dwelt during your meditation, and this recollection, however imperfect it may be, will naturally prompt you to put into execution the good resolutions, which these motives have induced you to make. Were you even to forget the peculiar reasons, which led you to these resolutions, you would remember, at least, that you have taken them upon mature deliberation, and this conviction would urge you to remain faithful to them.

Gerson set so much value upon meditation, that being asked what occupation appeared to him most useful to a religious—spiritual reading, vocal prayer, manual labor, or meditation—he answered that it was meditation. For, he remarked, although during vocal prayer, and spiritual reading, we may perhaps feel more fervor; yet, as soon as these two exercises are over, the actual devotion, to which they

gave rise, generally ceases. But meditation prepares the mind for the future, and has an influence upon all our actions.

SECTION V.

Cautions, and directions on the practice of mental prayer, or meditation.

1. NOTWITHSTANDING the importance and necessity of meditation, we should not however spend all the time we set apart for mental prayer, in reflections and considerations; because, it would then become a study, and cease to be a prayer. Meditation is to be used, as a means to excite the desire of virtue in our hearts. For the perfection of a Christian, does not consist either in good thoughts, or in the knowledge of holy things; but in the acquirement, and practice of christian virtues. We endeavour to understand what virtue is, says Gerson, not precisely, to know it; but to become virtuous. St. Ignatius, after having spoken, in his 'Exercises,' of the subjects on which we should meditate, adds, that in order that they may be of any advantage to us, we should apply them to ourselves, according to our spiritual wants, and the peculiarity of our own circumstances. In a word, all the fruit, we ought to derive from meditation, consists in forming holy resolutions, to practise them afterwards in due time. This is the great object which we should have in view, in applying to it. Action, says St. Ambrose, is the end of meditation.

Let us not therefore, during mental prayer, bestow on reflections and considerations, more time than necessary to excite in us pious affections and holy desires; but, as soon as we experience these, let us dwell upon them, and give them time to sink deeply into our hearts. It is so impor-

tant to dwell a long time upon these acts of the will, and holy desires of the heart, that the masters of a spiritual life say that mental prayer is perfect, when we have no longer need of recurring to meditation to excite ourselves to the love of God, but feel and enjoy it, without any effort or exertion of our understanding. Meditation and the exercise of all the faculties of our minds in mental prayer, are to be directed to contemplation, and used as so many steps to ascend to it. We search by reading, says St. Austin, we find by meditating; we ask by prayer, we enjoy by contemplation. He then cites the words of Christ, 'Seek, and you shall find—knock, and it shall be opened to you,'¹ and adds: Seek by reading, and you will find by meditating; knock by prayer, and it shall be opened to you in contemplation. The same saint, writing on this warning of our Lord, 'When you are praying, speak not much,'² remarks that there is a great difference between using a multiplicity of words in prayer, and dwelling a long time on pious affections. The former, he says, we ought to avoid; the latter, we should devoutly insist upon; for prayer is a business which is better carried on by sighs, than by words. Beauty of thought, strength of argument, and fluency of speech, are of no service to us when we converse with God.

2. From these remarks, it is easy to infer, that those who complain that they know not how to meditate, do not properly understand the nature of meditation. This holy exercise requires not learning, but a great desire of serving and loving God. Those who are not learned, says Gerson, are even sometimes more fervent and devout, in mental prayer, than others; because they are not liable to waste much time in vain speculations, which have no effect on the will and conduct; but their first endeavour is, by simple and moving reflections, to excite in their hearts pious affections, holy desires, and generous resolutions. It is related that a holy

1 Mat. vii. 7.

2 Mat. vi. 7.

religious of the order of St. Francis, said one day to St. Bonaventure: God has given you, and other learned men, great talents, by which you are able to serve and praise him; but as for us, plain, ignorant men, what can we do to please him?—Had a man received no other grace, than to be able to love God, answered the saint, by this grace alone he could become more acceptable to him, and acquire more merit, than by all other means put together—Then, replied the good brother, a poor illiterate person can have as much love for Jesus Christ, as a wise and learned man—Doubtless, said St. Bonaventure, he can love him with as much fervor as the most profound scholar, and learned theologian.

3. In order to derive much benefit from mental prayer, we must bear in mind, that it is not itself the end which we propose to ourselves, in leading a religious life, but a means we use to promote our spiritual advancement. For our perfection does not consist in enjoying the consolations and sweets of contemplation, but in acquiring the mastery over our passions, and evil inclinations,—in subjecting our sensual appetites to reason, and our reason to the law of God. And it is to accomplish this, that we have recourse to mental prayer, as to a most profitable means to succeed. How hard soever iron may be, it is softened by fire, and becomes fit for any use we may choose to make of it. Mental prayer will produce a similar effect in our hearts: they are naturally hard and inflexible, but the fervor of our devotion mollifies them, and renders them susceptible of the most virtuous impressions and the slightest touches of divine grace.

4. It is particularly in times of spiritual trial, in the hour of temptation and trouble, that we should recur to mental prayer, in order to receive from God that help which we require to remain faithful to him, whilst they last; and to derive from them all the advantage which they are intended to produce in us. Jesus Christ has taught us this by his

own example. On the night before he was to be 'betrayed into the hands of sinners,'¹ he retired to Mount Olivet, and continued a long time in prayer, to prepare himself for the conflict which he was to undergo against 'the power of darkness' throughout the various stages of his passion. Not that he himself needed preparation or help, remarks St. Ambrose, but because he wished to teach us, by his conduct on that occasion, to have recourse to prayer as to a most efficacious means to surmount all the difficulties, which we encounter in the practice of virtue. St. Paul, finding himself harassed by the buffets of an angel of satan, 'thrice besought the Lord,' that he might be freed from the temptation;² and he received a grace not only 'sufficient' to overcome it, but which caused him 'to glory in his infirmities.'

5. In selecting the subject of our meditations, we should know the fruit, and peculiar benefit, which we intend to derive from them. I have already said that we apply to mental prayer, with a view to promote our spiritual advancement: but it is obvious that in order to succeed in this, we ought to know what the wants of our souls are, and by what means they can be supplied. Let us therefore, before we begin our meditation, consider attentively what virtue we stand most in need of—whether it be patience, humility, modesty, prudence, or charity—that we may reflect seriously on the motives which are best calculated to induce us to acquire it, and beg it of God earnestly. Let us follow the same method with regard to our predominant passion, our ordinary faults, our daily weaknesses and imperfections. Let us know them first, and then direct our attention, during our meditation, to such considerations as may enable us, with the help of divine grace, to overcome them. Let this be the fruit we intend to derive from our prayer.—One is full of pride and vanity; another is a slave to anger and impatience; a third is wedded to his own opinions: let each

1 Mat. xxvi. 45.

2 2 Cor. xii. 8.

of them propose to himself the acquirement of the contrary virtues, as the principal benefit which he wishes to reap from the practice of mental prayer. The blind man, mentioned by St. Luke,¹ having been asked to tell what he wished our Saviour to do for him, answered: 'Lord! that I may see.' He does not mention his poverty, remarks St. Ephrem, nor any other of his wants: he asks what is most important, and necessary—the restoration of his sight. In like manner, adds the same saint, we ought in our prayers to beg of God, with fervor and perseverance, what we most stand in need of, until we have obtained it.

This attention to our spiritual wants, and to the particular object which we ought to have in view in prayer, does not however require that we should confine ourselves, exclusively, to one thing in our meditations. Although humility, for instance, or some other virtue, be what we have the greatest need of, yet we may in mental prayer occupy ourselves profitably in the exercise of other virtues, when we are led to do so, by the considerations we have already made on the subject which we had first chosen, or by the spirit of God. Whatever may be the subject of your meditation, if you feel inclined to acts of conformity to the will of God, of gratitude for his benefits, and the like, dwell upon them as long as you can; all the time you employ in this manner, will be well spent. It will, moreover, be easy to apply these various considerations and pious affections to the particular wants of our souls, and to adapt them to the main point we have in view in mental prayer. For all virtues are inseparably connected one with another: and he who possesses any one of them, in an eminent degree, possesses them all. Thus, root out pride from your heart, and implant humility in its stead: as soon as you are truly humble, you will also be patient; you will complain of nothing; how much soever you may have to bear with, you

will think it less than you deserve for your sins, and daily imperfections. Again, true humility will be productive of charity towards your neighbour: you will judge ill of nobody; because you will feel so much shame for your own faults, that you will not be tempted to scrutinize those of others. And so in like manner, all virtues being linked together as the rings of a chain, one will lead to another, and perfect it.

6. When the mysteries of our holy religion are the subject of our meditation, it is very important not to be satisfied with a superficial view of their nature, but to dwell leisurely and attentively on every particular connected with them; that we may be able the better to understand the great truths, which they are so well calculated to illustrate, and ‘to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth of the goodness of God.’¹ When the Lord is pleased to impart light to our souls, one single consideration suffices to occupy us a long time, and becomes an inexhaustable source of spiritual consolations. ‘Open thou my eyes,’ said the psalmist, ‘and I will consider the wondrous things of thy law—I will rejoice at thy words, as one that hath found great spoil.’² ‘I remembered God; and I was delighted.’³ St. Austin and St. Francis spent whole days and nights in repeating these words: ‘Who art thou, O Lord! and who am I?—Oh! that I could know thee! that I could know myself! Thou art my God, and all things to me!’ This perfect mode of prayer is similar to that which the blessed use in heaven, where, ravished with admiration at the divine majesty, they incessantly ‘cry out, one to another, and say: Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God of hosts!’⁴—‘And they rested not, day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty! who was, and who is, and who is to come.’⁵ But to arrive at

1 Eph. iii. 18.

3 Ps. lxxvi. 4.

5 Apoc. iv. 8.

2 Ps. cxviii. 18. 162.

4 Isaias vi. 3.

this perfection in our prayers, and co-operate with the grace of God, from whom we must ultimately obtain it, we ought seriously to reflect on the various circumstances of the mysteries which faith teaches us, and apply them to ourselves.

The means to succeed in this sort of prayer, says Gerson, is constant practice. He 'who reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly,'¹ acts in the order of grace, as he does in the order of nature: as he would have us to acquire human arts and sciences by applying ourselves to them, and practising them; so in like manner, he wishes us to obtain the knowledge of heavenly things by holy meditations, and the science of prayer by assiduous practice and unwearied exertions. In a word, do you wish to learn how to meditate?—practise meditation. Would you know how to pray?—pray as well as you are able—improve the 'talent' which our Lord has given you, 'according to your ability,'² and he will reward your fidelity, by a more abundant communication of his grace and of the spirit of holy prayer; 'the hidden things of his wisdom he will make manifest to you.'³ 'If any man want wisdom,' says St. James, 'let him ask of God, who giveth to all abundantly—and it shall be given him.'⁴ Remain prostrate at the foot of the cross of your Saviour; acknowledge that you are unworthy of God's consolations, on account of your sins—and the acts of patience and humility which you will then perform, will be a kind of prayer, most pleasing to God and profitable to yourself.

7. I have already remarked that we should not amuse ourselves, during prayer, with making idle speculations; but direct our attention to the wants of our souls, and the manner in which we conduct the great affair of our salvation. One may ask himself: How does my account with my divine Master stand now? What atonement have I offered; what amends have I made for my past sins? What

progress have I made in patience, humility, and the mortification of my passions? Another will employ the time allotted for meditation in examining, before Almighty God, how he fulfils the duties of his profession, and the peculiar obligations attached to his situation in life. These, and the like considerations, would afford ample matter for meditation, and innumerable opportunities to know and improve ourselves.

Gerson speaks of a great servant of God, who, after applying himself to prayer during forty years, said that he never could find an easier or more useful method of mental prayer, than to present himself before God as a child, as one naked, and destitute of all things. The royal prophet often made use of this kind of prayer: the psalms are full of passages in which he calls himself 'an orphan, a beggar, a poor, blind, and forlorn man.' See with what patience and humility a poor beggar asks, and waits for help, at the rich man's gate; how minutely he details his wants; with what perseverance and eagerness, he begs and entreats. Follow his example; for, When we pray, says St. Austin, we are beggars. 'As the eyes of the hand-maid are on the hands of her mistress,' when she wishes to obtain something from her, 'So let our eyes be unto the Lord our God, until he have mercy upon us.'¹

It is related that a poor clown, who carried the baggage of St. Ignatius and his companions, during their journey to Barcelona, perceiving that as soon as they stopped at an inn, they retired to say their prayers, was led by their example to do the same himself. The fathers having asked him, one day, what he was doing on his knees during all that time, he answered—I say: These persons here, O Lord! are saints, and I am their beast of burden: they are now in prayer, and I wish to do what they are doing. A holy religious of the Society of Jesus, and one endowed with

great talents, is said to have, for a long time, used no other sort of mental prayer than this: O Lord! I am a stupid man, I know not how to pray, do thou teach me!

When St. Francis of Borgia thought he had not discharged the duty of prayer with all the attention and piety it requires, he endeavoured, on that day, to be more humble, more recollected, more mortified, than usual, in order to atone thereby for his neglect and inattention. The holy Abbot Nilus says: If you wish to pray well, do nothing contrary to prayer; for then, God will come to you, and go along with you.

SECTION VI.

Distractions in prayer, and their remedies.

DISTRACTIONS in prayer proceed from various, and often very different causes. Our first care should be to ascertain the particular cause of the distractions, which we experience during our prayers, and to remove it, when it can be removed. For if our distractions arise from any cause which we can, and ought to remove, they will be sinful, as long as we do not remove it. Under these circumstances, it would be unreasonable to complain that we cannot be recollected in time of prayer, and that our attention is carried away by a thousand vain and unbecoming thoughts. The efforts which we might make in order to banish them, would, generally speaking, be useless and unavailing. These distractions would still be, as divines speak, voluntary in their cause. Thus, if your fondness for the pleasures and amusements of the world, be the cause of your distractions in prayer—restrain it within proper bounds—seek retirement, and love solitude. If it be pride, practise humility; if levity, be more serious; if any other passion or

habit, acquire the contrary virtue, and follow a different course.

After having taken the necessary means to retrench the ordinary causes of distractions, the next thing we have to do is, to banish them when any present themselves in the time of prayer. Thus, these distractions not being wilful, either in their cause, or whilst they last, will not render our prayers less acceptable to God, nor less profitable to us. Nay, they will contribute to our spiritual improvement, even more than the most sublime and moving prayers, if we earnestly strive to reject them, and bear with humility this experience of our weakness. For 'the Lord is compassionate and merciful—as a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.'¹ The most pious are not exempt from such wanderings of the mind as originate in human frailty, and the malice of the devil: they cannot always control their imagination, and commune with their God in the perfect silence of all worldly cares. But these distractions do not disturb the peace of their souls: they serve, on the contrary, to render them more watchful, more humble, and persevering.

According to a maxim of the ancient fathers of the desert, the state of our minds is, during prayer, what it generally is throughout the day. So that the surest preparatory means to be recollected in time of prayer, is, to be mindful of the presence of God, and cherish the habit of spiritual recollection, at all times. It is natural to think of what we love. If you wish to have your mind fixed upon God, during prayer, withdraw your affections from the world, and fill your hearts with the desire of heavenly things.

St. Basil remarks that the best means to avoid being distracted in time of prayer, is, to consider that we are then

speaking to God, whose majesty requires, at least, that we should think of what we say to him. St. Ignatius wishes us never to lose sight, during our prayers, of the divine presence, in which we ought to place ourselves in a particular manner, when we begin them; so that we may be able to say with the psalmist, 'The meditation of my heart is always in thy sight.'¹ When you go to prayer, says St. Chrysostom, imagine that you are entering the heavenly court, where the king of glory is seated on his throne, surrounded by a multitude of angels and saints, and that the eyes of all are fixed upon you; for it is then, you can apply to yourselves, in a peculiar and most appropriate sense, the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians: 'We are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men.'²

The pious are accustomed to preserve during prayer a lively sense of the presence of God, and repel distractions, by various methods which experience recommends to them. Some turn themselves towards the nearest church, in which the Blessed Sacrament is kept; and prostrate in mind before 'the altars of the Lord of hosts,'³—'their hearts and their flesh rejoice in the living God.'⁴ Others lift up their eyes to heaven, and contemplate, 'in the light inaccessible, which he inhabiteth, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, to whom honour and everlasting empire are due.'⁵ Others again, look at their crucifix, the images of saints, or other religious pictures.

You will also find it a useful remedy against distractions and spiritual aridities, to represent your weakness to God by short and fervent prayers, and implore his assistance. The holy scriptures, and particularly the psalms of David, furnish us with many, which we may use according to the peculiar circumstances in which we find ourselves. Take the following:

1 Ps. xviii. 15.

3 Ps. lxxxiii. 4.

5 1 Tim. vi. 15. 16.

2 1 Epis. iv. 9.

4 Ps. lxxxiii. 2.

‘Lord! I suffer violence, answer thou for me—I will recount to thee all my years, in the bitterness of my soul.’¹

‘I am the man that see my poverty—he hath filled me with bitterness. The Lord will not cast off forever; for if he hath cast off, he will also have mercy.’²

‘Why art thou sad, O my soul! and why dost thou disquiet me? Hope in God; for I will still give praise to him.’³

‘O Lord God of hosts! how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy servant?’⁴ Give joy to the soul of thy servant; for to thee, O Lord! I have lifted up my soul.⁵ According to the multitude of my sorrows, in my heart, thy comforts have given joy to my soul.’⁶

‘O my God! enlighten my darkness.’⁷—Take not thy holy spirit from me: restore unto me the joy of thy salvation. Thou wilt open my lips, and my soul shall declare thy praise.’⁸

‘I am become as a beast before thee; and I am always with thee—It is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord.’⁹ May he cause the light of his countenance to shine upon us.’¹⁰

‘My soul hath slumbered through heaviness: strengthen thou me in thy words—Give me understanding, and I will search thy law—Thou art good: and in thy goodness, teach me thy justifications.’¹¹

‘O God! my God, look upon me: why hast thou forsaken me?—My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue hath cleaved to my jaws.’¹² My heart is troubled—and the light of my eyes itself is not with me.’¹³

‘Lord! why castest thou off my prayer? why turnest thou away thy face from me?’¹⁴—How long, O Lord! wilt

1 Isaias xxxviii. 14. 15.

6 Ps. xciii. 19.

11 Ps. cxviii. 28. 34. 68.

2 Lament. iii. 1. 15. 31. 32.

7 Ps. xvii. 29.

12 Ps. xxi. l. 16.

3 Ps. xlii. 5. 6.

8 Ps. l. 13. 14. 17. 13 Ps. xxxvii. 11.

4 Ps. lxxix. 5.

9 Ps. lxxii. 23. 28. 14 Ps. lxxxvii. 15.

5 Ps. lxxxv. 4.

10 Ps. lxi. 2.

thou forget me unto the end?'¹ Incline thy ear, O Lord! and hear me; for I am needy and poor—Thou, O Lord! art a God of compassion, patient, and of much mercy—O look upon me! and have mercy on me.'²

'My soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God, and was delighted—Will God cast off for ever? or will he never be favourable again?'³ Be thou, O my soul! subject to God—In God is my salvation, and my glory: he is the God of my help, and my hope is in God.'⁴

'My soul is as earth without water unto thee. Hear me speedily, O Lord!—cause me to hear thy mercy in the morning, for in thee have I hoped.'⁵

An excellent remedy, or rather a most efficacious preservative against distractions in mental prayer, is, to ascertain and prepare, before hand, the subject on which we intend to meditate. This we should begin, at night, and continue, as soon as we awake in the morning. Cassian, St. Bonaventure, and St. Climachus, consider this preparation to be of great importance: they say that our praying well, and by consequence, our acting well, during the whole day, depend upon it. St. Climachus adds, that the devil, knowing how important it is to begin the day well, watches early in the morning, that he may succeed in seizing upon our first thoughts, and thus deprive God of the first fruits of the day. St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, writing upon these words of Ecclesiasticus, 'Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God,'⁶ say that to make no preparation before mental prayer, is to tempt God; because, we tempt God, when we wish to obtain a thing without making use of the means which he has established to that effect: and of course, as preparation is one of the means required to pray well—to neglect that means, is to tempt God. In other words: it is the will of God that we

1 Ps. xii. 1.

3 Ps. lxxvi. 3. 4. 8.

5 Ps. cxlii. 6. 7. 8.

2 Ps. lxxxv. 1. 15. 16.

4 Ps. xli. 6. 8.

6 Chap. xviii. 23.

should be attentive in prayer; but he wishes us, at the same time, to use the ordinary means, which will enable us to avoid distractions.

SECTION VII.

Method of mental prayer.

THE following method contains the practical application of the principles laid down in the foregoing sections.

Mental prayer consists of three parts—the *commencement* or *preparation*, the *body*, and the *conclusion*.

I. The commencement or preparation of mental prayer.

Three things must be done in the commencement of mental prayer.

1st. We must place ourselves in the presence of God, by an act of faith: believing firmly that he is every where; that he is in the place where we are, and in our very hearts. This prompts us to adore him, and conduct ourselves with respect before his divine majesty.

2dly. We should acknowledge ourselves unworthy to appear before God, on account of our sins, ask pardon, by an act of contrition, and unite ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ, that we may come before his Father, and address him, in his name.

3dly. We should acknowledge that we are, of ourselves, unable to pray in a manner profitable to our salvation; and invoke the assistance of the Holy Spirit, that we may do it well.

II. The body of mental prayer.

The body of mental prayer contains three points.

In the first, we should consider the subject of our mental prayer in reference to our Lord, paying attention to what

he has said, done, or thought, on this subject—and then, render him our homage by adoring his sentiments, his words, his actions; praising them, loving them, and filling our hearts with emotions of gratitude; to which we may add acts of admiration, of joy, or compassion, according to the nature of the subject. And if the subject of our mental prayer should be the perfections of God, or the persons of the most Holy Trinity, we should adore them, and render them the other homages of religion.

In the second point, we should consider the subject of our mental prayer in reference to ourselves.

1st. Examining what we ought to do, or avoid for our sanctification; and, in order to urge ourselves more effectually to embrace virtue, and fly from vice, we should endeavor to convince our understandings of our duty, by considering those motives and reasons, which may induce us most powerfully to comply with it.

2dly. We should compare our conduct with our obligations on this subject, and enter into serious reflection with ourselves to ascertain if we have been faithful to our duty: and, as this research will bring to our view many faults, we ought, therefore, to humble ourselves, to make acts of contrition for our past sins, of confusion at our present state, of desire to do better for the time to come, and to excite other affections, correspondent to the investigation we have made.

3dly. In view of our past faults, and present weakness, we must have recourse to God, and ask of him, with earnestness, the grace to do better in future—employing, to obtain it, the merits of our Lord, and the intercession of the most holy Virgin and the saints.

In the third point, to co-operate with the grace which we have just asked of God, we should adopt good resolutions, conformable to the subject of our mental prayer, and our spiritual necessities. These resolutions should be not only general, but particular, and adapted to the circumstances of

the present time. They should be efficacious, and such as will enable us, with God's help, to surmount every obstacle to our perfection: finally, they should be accompanied with distrust in ourselves, and confidence in God.

III. *The conclusion of mental prayer.*

The conclusion of mental prayer comprehends three things.

1st. We should return thanks to God for the graces he has bestowed on us during prayer.

2dly. We should ask his pardon for the faults which we have committed in it.

3dly. We should beseech him to bless our resolutions, the present day, our life, and our death. We compose then the spiritual nosegay, which is the selection of certain good thoughts, or holy affections, which have touched us most during our mental prayer, to call them to mind, from time to time, throughout the day.

We close, by placing our resolutions and the fruit of our mental prayer, under the protection of the most blessed Virgin, and to that end, we may say the anthem, 'We fly to thy patronage,' &c.

Remarks.

I. Before mental prayer—1. We should dispose ourselves for it, by flight from sin, and by purity of heart; by internal, and exterior recollection; and by the sincere intention of seeking in it nothing but the glory of God, and our advancement in virtue.

2. We should prepare the subject of our mental prayer; by selecting and reading it, the night before, and bearing it in mind, in the morning.

II. During mental prayer—1. It is not necessary to make in one mental prayer many reflections, or all the acts designated in this method; but when we are usefully occupied in certain considerations, or holy affections, such as sorrow

for sin, love of God, and the like, we ought not to leave them on pretext of passing to others.

We ought to lay the greatest stress on affections, petitions, and resolutions, which constitute the most important part of mental prayer. Hence, we need not be solicitous to excite the affections, or make our petitions and resolutions, only in the precise order marked out in this method ; but if we feel ourselves attracted to them, from the commencement, or out of the prescribed course, it is good to yield to the impulse, without delay.

If we feel inclined to any other mode of prayer, we should propose it to our director, and follow his advice.

2. Although distractions, indifference or even temptations should invade us during mental prayer, we ought not, on this account to be discouraged, nor give up its practice : but we should persevere—renouncing faithfully those distractions, resisting firmly those temptations, and sustaining, with patience, that dullness of spirit, and tepidity.

3. Besides the petitions we should make for our peculiar wants, it is good, at the close of our mental prayer, to pray for the church, for our parents, friends, benefactors, and others entitled to our prayers.

III. After mental prayer—1. We should take care to preserve, throughout the day, the same sentiments which we entertained during prayer ; and be guarded not to lose them, by returning with too much earnestness and haste to our other occupations.

2. It is good to write down, sometimes, what has touched us most during mental prayer, and the resolutions we have then made ; particularly during retreats, and when our director deems it expedient ; and it will be useful to read these things over, from time to time.

3. We should endeavor often to call to mind, throughout the day, the good resolutions we have formed, and to watch for occasions to put them in practice.

SECTION VIII.

Conditions of prayer.

WHAT are the conditions required to make our prayers agreeable to God, and efficacious in obtaining what we ask of him? This question is put by Bishop Hay, in his 'Devout Christian.'—I shall insert his answer to it, as a complement of what I have said on prayer in the preceding pages, which will be useful to all my readers, and, probably, necessary for some of them.—This indeed, writes this pious and learned prelate, is a most important subject, as it is for want of some one or other of these conditions that our prayers are rendered fruitless, and hindered from having the effect which we desire. There are several conditions required on our part, which therefore must be carefully attended to. They are as follow:

1. To be in friendship with God, and free from the guilt of sin.—When a person lives in the guilt of known sin, and in disgrace with God, his soul is utterly incapable of receiving his heavenly gifts, and he is positively unworthy of receiving any favor from him; and the holy scripture assures us that nothing is a greater hindrance to our prayers being heard, than to live in such a state of enmity with God. David tells us, that, 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto his prayers; but the countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil things, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.'¹ And God himself says to all such, 'When you stretch forth your hands, I will turn away my eye from you; and when you multiply prayer, I will not hear; for your hands are full of blood,'² that is, your souls are defiled with the guilt of your sins, which render you hateful to me, like a person whose hands are reeking with the blood of his neighbor whom he has

murdered. So also, Isaias says to sinners, 'Your iniquities have divided between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he should not hear.'¹ Hence Jeremias laments the sins of his people in these words, 'We have done wickedly and provoked thee to wrath; therefore thou art inexorable; thou hast set a cloud before thee, that our prayer may not pass through.'² Nay, the wise man declares, that 'he that turneth away his ears from hearing the law, his prayer shall be an abomination.'³

It is true, indeed, that though a person has been ever so great a sinner, yet if he returns to God with a sincere repentance and cries for mercy, his prayer will be heard, and the scripture is full of the most encouraging assurances to all such; thus, 'Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found, call upon him, while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unjust man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he is bountiful to forgive.'⁴ And the examples of the humble publican and the prodigal son, with other such, show clearly how ready Almighty God is to hear the prayers of the greatest sinners, when they return to him and cry for mercy.

But to be entitled to all the glorious effects of prayer, and to the sacred promises which Jesus Christ makes to hear our prayers, we must leave off our evil ways, and be in friendship with him; and this condition is expressly made to these promises. Thus, 'If you abide in me,' says Jesus Christ, 'and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you.'⁵ 'He that loveth God shall obtain pardon for his sins by prayer, and shall refrain himself from them, and he shall be heard in the prayer of days.'⁶ 'Delight in the Lord, and he will

1 Chap. lix. 2.

2 Lament. iii. 42. 44.

3 Prov. xxviii. 9.

4 Isaias lv. 6.

5 John xv. 7.

6 Eccl. iii. 4.

give thee the request of thy heart.'¹ 'Dearly beloved,' says St. John, 'if our heart do not reprehend us we have confidence towards God, and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.'² And therefore St. James assures us, that 'the continual prayer of a just man availeth much.'³

2. That the things we pray for, be conducive to our salvation, and according to the will of God—The great end which God had in view in creating this universe, and in all he has done in it, whether in the order of nature or in the order of grace, is the salvation of souls; and all the good things that he has bestowed upon us in this life, are intended only as helps or means to enable us to secure this great end of our being. Hence the riches and enjoyments of this world, if they be so used as to promote our salvation, are real goods to us; but, if we abuse them to the hurt of our souls, they become real evils. On the contrary, if the miseries and sufferings of this life are so used as to be of service to our souls, however afflicting they be in the mean time to our nature, they are in fact real goods; but if we abuse them to the loss of our souls, they are real evils. The salvation of our soul is the only important affair we have to think of; it is of no manner of consequence, what way we be in, while in this valley of tears, whether in wealth or poverty, in sickness or health, in ease or pain, provided we can only save our souls; but if we lose our souls, all is lost forever.

Finally, considering the corruption of our nature by sin, it is much more difficult to save our souls amidst the plenty and abundance of worldly enjoyments, than with a moderate sufficiency of the necessities of life, or even amidst sufferings and afflictions—From these undoubted principles it follows; that the great and continual object of our desires;

and consequently of our prayers, ought to be our eternal salvation, and all those goods which are necessary for securing it, such as victory over our passions, grace to resist temptations, the living free from sin, our advancement in virtue, patience in our sufferings, union with the will of God, final perseverance by a happy death, and the like. We are absolutely certain that all these things are according to the will of God, and what he is most ready to grant us, because 'He wills all men to be saved.'¹ But as for the good things of this world, or the being delivered from its evils, a Christian ought never to desire them for themselves, nor pray for them, but only as far as God sees that they may be of use to his soul.

We know how strongly Jesus Christ forbids his followers to set their hearts upon these things, or seek their happiness in them; how strictly he enjoins them, by mortification and self-denial, to take off their affections from them; while at the same time he passes his sacred promise to them that, if they do so, he will take care to supply them with such a sufficiency of the goods of this life, as will be necessary for their support, and of no hurt, but of service to their souls.

When we pray for the salvation of our souls, and those graces which are conducive to, or necessary for obtaining it, we may depend upon being heard, when, in what manner, and in what proportion God sees best for us; because it is only to these goods that all the promises of hearing our prayers are made. When we pray for temporal goods, the promises of hearing such prayers are only conditional; if God sees it is for the good of our souls, he will grant what we ask; if not, he will refuse it; unless in punishment of our too great anxiety for, and attachment to these goods, he should grant in his anger what he would refuse in his mercy. Hence, we may and ought to pray for the former goods, with all the ardor of our soul, and with all the confidence of

being heard, and without any condition. But with regard to our temporal necessities, we should either not ask for them at all, but humbly laying all such necessities before God, leave it to him, by a holy resignation to his will, to do as he sees best; or if we do ask for them, as it is certainly laudable and lawful to do so, we ought to ask them only as a secondary and accessory means of salvation, and always with this condition, if God sees it is for the good of our souls, and only as far as he sees so, but with an entire resignation to his will to give them or not as he pleases. All this is confirmed by repeated testimonies of scripture; thus, 'Be not solicitous therefore, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? for after all these things do the heathens seek: for your Father knows that you have need of all those things. Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be added to you.'¹ Again, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you.'² What can we ask in the name of the Saviour, but what conduces to our salvation? Would it not be injurious to him, to ask any thing in his name which would be hurtful to our souls? and would he be a Saviour to us, if he should grant such a prayer? 'If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask them?'³ What are good things in the judgment of God? Surely only such as are for the good of the soul. Would it be receiving good things from God, if we ask him for what he knows would make us eternally miserable, and he should grant them? Is it his will to give us such goods? and would it be asking according to his will, if we should pray for such? Now it is upon asking according to his will, that our confidence of being heard must be founded: hence, St. John says, 'This is the

1 Mat. vi. 31.

2 John xvi. 23.

3 Mat. vii. 11.

confidence which we have towards him, that whatsoever we shall ask, according to his will, he heareth us; and we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask; we know we have the petitions which we request of him.’¹

But as for temporal goods, or the being delivered from temporal evils, Christ himself shows us by his own example, that we should pray for them only conditionally, and with resignation; for being oppressed with sorrow in the garden at the sight of the dreadful chalice of sufferings he was going to endure, he prayed thus, ‘Father! if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me!—nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt,’² and again, ‘Father! if thou wilt, remove this chalice from me—but yet, not my will, but thine be done.’³ Where we see both, that it is laudable and lawful to pray for temporal favors, and that all such prayers ought to be made with perfect resignation to the will of God, and on condition that he thinks proper to grant them. We must pray for them, because prayer is the necessary means to obtain them, as well as all other good things; but we must leave it entirely to God to grant them or not as he thinks fit, because we are perfectly ignorant, whether it would be good for us to have them or not. In all such cases we ought to be firmly persuaded, that if he does not think fit to grant the very thing we ask, he will grant us something else which he sees better for us; for prayer can never be fruitless. It is a promise made by Christ himself, that ‘every one that asketh (properly) receiveth,’⁴ and when we ask temporal goods in the way Christ did, we surely ask properly, and therefore, receive we shall, if not the very thing we ask, something better for us. Thus, St. Paul thrice besought the Lord to be delivered from the angel of Satan that was given to buffet him, and was denied that favor; but he received a much greater one, a plentiful grace

1 Epist. v. 14.

2 Mat. xxvi. 39.

3 Luke xxii. 42.

4 Mat. vii. 8.

to support him, and enable him to overcome the enemy with great fruit to his soul.

3. That we pray with attention, and fervor—These two qualities of good prayer are joined together, because they naturally arise from, and are accompanied by one another. Prayer, properly speaking, consists in two things, to wit: the desires of our heart for some good thing, and the manifesting those desires to God: and it is evident, that if either of these two be wanting, there is no prayer. This manifestation of our desires to God may be either by the heart alone, and this is to pray mentally, or they may be expressed also in words, and this is to pray vocally. The foundation then of prayer is the desires of the heart; it is by them that the heart is dilated and disposed for receiving the things we pray for; according to that of our Saviour, ‘Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill.’¹ These desires arise from the high esteem we have for the good things we wish; the greater and more fervent our desires for any good are, the more they show how great our esteem is of it; but if our desires be weak and languid, our esteem must be but little. Now, as the good things of God are of inestimable value in themselves, he requires of us to have a great esteem for them, and of course an ardent desire of them; this high esteem and fervent desire, is what moves him in a particular manner to bestow his gifts upon us; thus, ‘the Lord hath heard the desire of the poor; thy ear hath heard the preparation of their heart.’² ‘In thy strength, O Lord! the king shall joy; and in thy salvation he shall rejoice exceedingly; thou hast given him his heart’s desire; and thou has not withholden from him the will of his lips.’³ ‘That which the wicked feareth, shall come upon him; to the just, their desire shall be given.’⁴ And when Daniel ‘set his face to make supplication with fasting and sack-

cloth and ashes,' and to pray for his people with great fervor, which he showed both in the expressions of his prayer itself, and in those penitential works with which he accomplished it, at last the angel Gabriel appeared to him, and said, 'O Daniel! I am now come forth to teach thee, and that thou mightest understand. From the beginning of thy prayers the word came forth: and I am come to show it to thee, because thou art a man of desires.'¹

But when a person has no esteem for the good things of God, when he has no great desire for them, when he prefers the perishable things of this life before them, and is more solicitous about the concerns of eternity, he is then totally indisposed for receiving the gifts of God; and though he should say some prayers for the good of his soul, yet these prayers being languid, cold and heartless, and he himself being as it were indifferent whether he receives them or not; such prayers are rather loathsome to God than pleasing, and more apt to move him to indignation than to pity, seeing they show a contempt of him and of his eternal goods, and that the preference is given to the world before him.

Hence it is manifest that our prayers must proceed from a heart inflamed with an ardent desire of the inestimable goods which we ask from God, just as the incense, which in scripture is proposed as an emblem of fervent prayer, then sends up its clouds of sweet smelling smoke towards heaven, when itself is burning upon the fire in the censer. Now when we manifest these desires to God mentally, and in the heart alone; though in some high degree of supernatural prayer, the imagination may sometimes be carried away with various distractions, even while the heart and will are exercising the most fervent affections towards God, yet ordinarily this is not the case; but our very expressing our desires to God, in our heart, naturally draws the atten-

¹ Dan. ix. 3. 22.

tion of the mind along with it. But the case is very different in our vocal prayers, for there it but too often happens that we recite with our lips those words which express the desires of the heart, whilst our mind is wandering about on a thousand idle and worldly objects, and the heart itself is perhaps engaged in affections very different from, and sometimes even contrary to those which the words contain. If, while we are pretending to honor God by reciting our prayers, we should either of ourselves set our thoughts a wandering upon improper objects, or knowingly entertain those that are suggested by the devil or our own imagination, without giving any attention to God, and what our lips are saying to him; this must be highly displeasing to God, and will render our prayers not only fruitless, but hurtful to us. Such pretended prayer is in fact no prayer at all, it is mere hypocrisy; it wants the foundation of prayer, which is the desire of the heart; it is a pretending to manifest to God the desires of the heart, by the words we repeat, whilst the heart has no desire at all of what the words express, but perhaps is occupied with affections displeasing to God. To such prayer is justly applied the reproach made by Isaias the prophet, and which our blessed Saviour applies to the Jews, 'Ye hypocrites, well has Isaias prophesied of you, saying, this people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me.' Of such also David says, 'they loved him with their mouth, and with their tongue they lied unto him: but their heart was not right with him.'²

Hence therefore it is manifest, that if we wish our prayers should be acceptable to God and profitable to ourselves, we must take care they flow from a fervent heart, burning with an earnest desire of obtaining from him those inestimable favours which we pray for, and which will conduct us to eternal bliss; and, at the same time, that we must say them

with all possible attention of mind, using the proper means, and our best endeavors to avoid all distracting thoughts in time of prayer, and to keep our mind recollected to the presence of that great God with whom we speak, and to the good things we ask of him.

4. The fourth condition required, to make our prayer efficacious is, that it be humble; that is, void of all presumption upon ourselves, or upon any merits of our own, as if we either could acquire any good by our own natural abilities, or had any thing in ourselves that could deserve it from God. This is a most essential quality of prayer, and the want of it is what more than any thing else will hinder God from granting what we pray for. It is founded upon two great truths, which we never can have too deeply impressed in our mind. The first is, that of ourselves we can do no good towards our salvation, neither resist temptations, nor break ill habits, nor avoid sin, nor acquire any virtue, nor persevere in good; nor in a word, do any thing that is acceptable in the sight of God. The second truth is, that of ourselves we deserve no help, no grace, nor any good thing from him; nay, that on account of our manifold sins, ingratitude and infidelity to him, we deserve nothing but stripes and punishments, and to be rejected by him entirely. That therefore we must never presume or have any dependance upon ourselves for obtaining any good, but expect it only from his goodness and mercy, through the merits of our blessed Saviour.

This holy disposition greatly increases the fervor of the soul; for we are never more earnest in desiring any good, than when we are thoroughly convinced of the greatness of our want of it; and, at the same time, it powerfully moves God to grant what we desire. This he declares by his prophet: 'To whom shall I have respect, but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my words?'¹ 'For thus saith the High and the Eminent,

that inhabiteth eternity, and his name is Holy, who dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit: to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.¹ For 'a contrite and humble heart, O God! thou wilt not despise.'² And therefore, 'he hath regard to the prayer of the humble, and he hath not despised their petition.'³ 'For the Lord is nigh to them that are of a contrite heart, and he will save the humble of spirit.'⁴ 'But God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.'⁵ The holy servants of God were most sensible of this truth, and therefore in all their prayers, which are recorded in scripture, especially in times of distress, we find they are all grounded in this holy virtue. Thus Judith says, 'Thy power, O God! is not in a multitude, nor is thy pleasure in the strength of horses, nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to thee, but the prayer of the humble and meek hath always pleased thee; hear me, a poor wretch, making supplication to thee, and presuming of thy mercy.'⁶ In like manner, Esther 'covered her head with ashes and dung, and she humbled her body with fasts; and she prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, saying: O my Lord! who alone art our king, help me, a desolate woman, who have no other helper but thee.'⁷ Daniel also, in his fervent prayer, which brought an angel from heaven to tell him what he wanted to know, says, 'Incline O my God! thy ear, and hear; open thy eyes, and see our desolation; for it is not in our justifications that we present our prayers before thy face, but for the multitude of thy tender mercies.'⁸ The different effects of the prayers of the humble publican, and of the proud pharisee, are well known; and the prayer of the prodigal son, by which he found favor with his father, was wholly founded in humility. Hence the wise man

1 Isai. lvii. 15.

2 Ps. l. 19.

3 Ps. ci. 18.

4 Ps. xxxiii. 19.

5 James iv. 6.

6 Judith ix. 16.

7 Esther xiv. 2.

8 Dan. ix. 18.

assures us, that 'The prayer of him that humbleth himself, shall pierce the clouds; and till it come nigh he will not be comforted, and he will not depart till the Most High behold: and the Lord will not be slack.'¹

The reason why humility is so powerful a means to find mercy with God, is because by it we give due honor to his almighty power, according to that, 'The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God; for great is the power of God alone, and he is honored by the humble.'² Now, though every Christian knows and believes the above two truths, upon which this humility of our prayers is founded, and, on that account, may be said to have humility of the understanding; yet such is the unhappy pride of our heart, that notwithstanding the conviction we have of our own weakness and unworthiness, still we feel our heart revolts at that truth, wishes always to have some good opinion of ourselves, as if there was something in us of our own, and which we have not from God, and is carried away as it were by violence to presume upon itself, and have a dependence on its own forces. To counteract the fatal effects of this unhappy disposition, it is a most useful practice, not only at the beginning of prayer, but also of every other duty, we have to do, to make an act of profound humility before God, expressly confessing our own inability to do it well without his assistance, and our unworthiness of any help from him; and renouncing all confidence in ourselves, throw ourselves entirely upon his mercy for what we need; and experience will show, that when this is done sincerely and from the heart, how powerful a benediction it brings from God. But we observed in all the above examples of the humble prayers of the saints, that while they rejected all trust or confidence in themselves, they presumed wholly upon the mercy of God; and therefore,

1. Eccl. xxxv. 21.

2 Eccl. iii. 20.

5. The fifth quality of prayer is, that this humble diffidence in ourselves be accompanied with a perfect trust and confidence in God, grounded solely upon his infinite goodness, his fidelity to his promises, and the merits of Jesus Christ. This confidence or hope in God, is a virtue which resides partly in the understanding, and partly in the will. In the understanding; because we firmly believe that God is exceedingly disposed and inclined by his own infinite goodness, and has bound himself by promise, to grant the good things we ask. In the will; because, adhering to this well founded belief, we undoubtedly hope, without hesitation or suspicion of the contrary, that God will actually grant us our demands; and being animated with this firm hope and confidence, we present our petitions to God with greater fervor of spirit, and with a holy importunity, which to him is most agreeable. Hence St. James says, 'If any of you want wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all abundantly, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask, in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is driven and tossed about by the wind; therefore, let not that man think he shall receive any thing of the Lord.'¹ Let him ask, 'in faith:' see the firm belief of the goodness, and fidelity of God; 'nothing wavering:' see here the unshaken hope and confidence of the will—Thus, the centurion, in his prayer for his servant's health, joined a profound humility with a perfect confidence, in so admirable a manner, as to make Jesus Christ himself express his surprise at it, and grant him, that instant, what he prayed for.² Which shows how agreeable it is to God that we have an entire confidence in him, and presume, as the scripture expresses it, of his mercy, when we are not conscious of any thing in ourselves to put a stop to it. But on the contrary, it is a great injury and affront to God to have any diffidence in him; as it manifestly

includes a supposition most injurious to his goodness; namely, that though he can, without the least trouble, and only by willing it, relieve us and assist us in what is really good for us, yet, even when we apply to him for it, he will not do it. It also involves a heinous affront to his veracity, by supposing he is capable of not performing his repeated promises to hear our prayers, and grant our pious requests.

6. Another most necessary quality of prayer, and which is the crown of all the former, is perseverance, accompanied with an humble resignation to the will of God. Though Almighty God has bound himself by his promise to grant us those good things which we ask of him in prayer, and which are conducive to our salvation; yet he has not bound himself to give us them, the very moment we ask them, nor yet in such manner or measure as we may ask, which perhaps may not always be the best for our souls. God is pleased indeed sometimes to hear our prayers immediately; at other times he wants to be entreated for days, and weeks, and months, and years; sometimes he is pleased to grant us at once the whole of what we ask; at other times, he imparts it by little and little, and as it were insensibly. Sometimes the thing we ask, though holy and good in itself, may not be so proper for us in our present dispositions and circumstances, and God in his infinite mercy is pleased to refuse that, but rewards our prayers with something better for us: now, as to all these circumstances, we must be perfectly resigned to whatever God pleases; it is enough for us to know that all is intended by his infinite wisdom for our greater good, which he alone knows how to promote; and that, if we persevere in our prayers, sooner or later he will grant us our heart's desire, in the way, manner, and measure that he knows best for us.

And indeed who are we, to set a time to the favors of God? When Judith had heard that Ozias the ruler of the people had agreed to give up the city to Holofernes, who

was besieging it, if within five days God did not relieve them, she said to him and the other rulers: 'What is this word by which ye have consented to give up the city to the Assyrians, if within five days there come no aid to us? And who are you that tempt the Lord? This is not a word that may draw down mercy; but rather that may stir up wrath, and enkindle indignation. You have set a time for the mercy of the Lord, and you have appointed him a day according to your pleasure! But for as much as the Lord is patient, let us be penitent for this same thing; and with many tears, let us beg his pardon, let us humble our souls before him, and, continuing in an humble spirit in his service, let us ask the Lord with tears, that according to his will, so he would show his mercy towards us.'¹ The high priest Eliachim's behaviour upon this same occasion, was very different from that of these rulers; for he went about all Israel, and spoke to them, saying, 'Know ye that the Lord will hear your prayers, if you continue with perseverance in fastings and prayers, in the sight of the Lord.'²

And indeed there is nothing which our blessed Saviour seems more earnest to inculcate to us, than to persevere in our prayers to God: the parable of the two friends is expressly intended for this purpose, and he concludes it with these words: 'Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend; yet because of his importunity he will rise, and give him as many loaves as he needeth.' And then he immediately adds, 'and I say to you: Ask, and it shall be given you,' &c.³ thereby showing us that this sacred promise of granting what we ask, is principally made to our perseverance in asking. And no wonder that perseverance should at last be victorious; for if it could even move the heart of the friend, and against his will to do what was displeasing to him, and grant what was asked of him; how

much more must it move the heart of God who is all goodness, who takes a delight to bestow his good things upon us, and who only delays granting them, that he may grant them afterwards more to our advantage, and as a reward of our very perseverance!

The parable of the unjust judge and the widow, was used by our Saviour, on purpose to show us, 'that we ought always to pray, and not to faint,'¹ that is, to persevere, without wearying, though God should delay hearing us; for that coming, he will come at last, and grant us all that we desire: and the example of the woman of Chanaan, with the happy fruits of her perseverance, is recorded at large for our encouragement and imitation. When she first presented her prayer to our blessed Saviour, he seemed not to mind her, and 'answered her not a word;' she persisted, and the disciples begged him to send her away, as being troublesome. But he seemed to despise her as having nothing to do with her, saying, 'I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel.' She, far from being discouraged by this apparent contempt, persisted with greater fervor, for 'she came and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me.' He still seemed unmoved, and said, 'It is not good to take the bread of the children, and cast it to the dogs;' but she, not in the least disturbed at this humiliating expression, humbled herself the more, persisted the more, and even from what he said drew an argument in her own favour. True, said she, it is so: I acknowledge myself a wretched creature, and unworthy of being treated as a child, but let me have at least what even the dogs get, 'for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their master.' O then! indeed, our Saviour's tender heart could resist no longer; the justice of her petition, which was the cure of her daughter who was grievously troubled by a devil, her fervor, her humility, her confidence, her perseverance, made such a

powerful assault upon him, that turning unto her, he said, 'O woman! great is thy faith, be it done to thee as thou wilt: and her daughter was cured from that hour.'¹

How strong an encouragement does all this give us, never to faint, never to be weary, never to give over knocking at the door of the divine mercy, till at last it be opened to us, to our great consolation! How does it teach us, rather to increase our fervor, our humility, and our confidence in him, when he seems not to hear us, with the firm persuasion that perseverance in these virtues will at last obtain our request! 'Do not therefore lose your confidence,' says St. Paul, 'which hath a great reward: for patience is necessary for you, that doing the will of God, you may receive the promise.'² When God delays granting what we ask, it is his will we should persevere with confidence and patience, and, in his good time, the promised reward will, without doubt, be given us.

1 Mat. xv. 25.

2 Heb. x. 35.

CHAPTER VI.

ON READING.

READING, as a spiritual exercise, has always been in common practice, and highly recommended, not only to persons who have consecrated themselves to God, in religious communities, but generally to all those who, though they live in the world, have firmly determined to lead a pious life. It has brought about the conversion of numberless sinners, and it still contributes much to the preservation of true devotion. Countless examples attest this, and therefore in all religious orders, care has been taken to assign particular portions of time to this salutary practice. Now, as there are bad books, others which are indifferent, and others that are good, we must apply the same classification to reading. There is one kind, which is bad and prohibited; another, which is indifferent and tolerated; and another, which is prescribed and enjoined on us. In reference to these three characteristics, we may consider all that appertains to reading—It is the division adopted by Bourdaloue, from whose *'Retraite'* this chapter is almost entirely translated.

SECTION I.

Bad and prohibited reading.

THIS is of two kinds; the one bad, or at least dangerous, with respect to morals; the other, with respect to faith, and true piety. The former, which tends to corrupt the soul and lead it to vice, is not common in religious families: upon this, it is hardly necessary to enlarge. I shall content myself with inserting a few remarks from two celebrated popular writers, which go to show that the great bulk of romances, under whatever title they may appear, belong to this kind of reading.

‘Romances,’ says Dr. Beattie, ‘are a very unprofitable study; most of them being unskillfully written, and the greater part indecent and immoral—To contract a habit of reading romances is extremely dangerous. They who do so, lose all relish for history, philosophy, and other useful knowledge; acquire a superficial and frivolous way of thinking; and never fail to form false notions of life, which come to be very hurtful to young people when they go out into the world. I speak not rashly, but with too good evidence, when I affirm, that many young persons of both sexes have, by reading romances, been ruined; and that many of the follies, and not a few of the crimes, now prevalent, may be traced to the same source.’¹

‘Such compositions,’ writes the learned author of the lives of the saints, ‘are extremely pernicious, both to morals and true literature—By substituting falsehood for true history, and a foolish idle amusement instead of solid instruction, they destroy in the mind that laudable thirst after truth, which the Author of nature imprinted in it—Another most pernicious effect of such reading is, that instead of forming, it perverts

and depraves the heart, poisons the morals, and excites passions, which it is the great business of a Christian to restrain. This is true, even of those writings of this kind, which seem least dangerous; since such fictions only please by insensibly flattering vanity, pride, ambition, and the like criminal inclinations. If this be so with regard to those romances, which, by some persons in the world, are called innocent, what censures shall we find harsh enough for the generality of such compositions, which are filled with scenes and intrigues of love, and tend to awake, cherish, and entertain the most dangerous of all the passions?"¹

As to that kind of dangerous reading, which might impair our faith, and beguile us from the straight path of solid piety, it is but too common, even among persons who glory in their belief of all that the church teaches; and we cannot employ, in relation to it, too much vigilance and precaution. How many books are spread abroad, which are, evidently and professedly, replete with errors against Catholic faith! How many are there of which the doctrine is, to say the least, suspicious; and whose venom is the more to be dreaded, as it is the more subtle and concealed! How many are filled with maxims tending to discredit good and ancient usages, and abolish them, for the sake of introducing novelties! We may say with certainty, that the reading of such books, is highly pernicious. Thus the church has most expressly prohibited some of them, and although she has not formally declared herself with regard to the rest, because that would have led to endless disquisitions, her ministers and true pastors speak of them sufficiently in her behalf, and labor daily to expose to the faithful the poison that is offered to their souls.

Reading of this sort is especially injurious to those who have not sufficient knowledge to discover, nor enough of piety to guard against the evil tendency of such works.

¹ Butler, *Life of St. Teresa*.

And it is a very frivolous excuse, which they frequently offer in their defence, that they read them merely through curiosity,—to see what the authors can say on subjects, with regard to which they know very well what they are to believe and how they should act;—so that they do not perceive the danger and contagion of which we speak. This is precisely as if, while swallowing poisoned liquor, they should consider themselves in safety, because they perceived in it nothing but what is agreeable to the sight and taste. Would that they could see this contagion! they would then be better able to avoid it. But, as they do not perceive it, and are yet warned by others of its presence, is it not the dictate of wisdom that they should absolutely reject, that, which would imperceptibly infect, and mislead them?

This is not, however, the course which they generally pursue. Because certain books are fashionable, they desire to see them: and, through the natural perversity of the human heart, it is sufficient that books should be censured and proscribed, to stimulate and increase curiosity. In vain do wise and vigilant guardians, endeavor to exclude them from the circle of their influence. Their watchfulness is eluded: the books are obtained; they are perused by stealth, but with assiduity, and gorge the soul, as with the daintiest nourishment. It is amazing that all this should be done without scruple, in spite of the censure and admonitions of superiors, and in opposition to the practice of all sincere and pious Christians. But, in truth, is it done without scruple? Can they, who indulge in such reading and under such circumstances, assure themselves that they have nothing to fear, nothing to reproach themselves with? and if they be so persuaded, is it not the grossest illusion?

It would be much more conformable to the spirit of our holy religion and genuine piety, to observe the following rules, and adhere to them inviolably:

1st. To read no book against the wish of one's superior.

2d. To mortify that excessive longing, which some persons feel, to read all new publications, under pretence that they are qualified to judge of their merit and orthodoxy, and that they run no risk and expose themselves to no danger in so doing.

3d. To abstain, in general, from all reading of a doubtful, or suspicious character. Were these principles universally adopted and strictly followed, we should not have to deplore the loss of so many souls, who, in the wreck of religious and moral virtues, are 'tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, in the wickedness of men, in craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive.'¹

SECTION II.

Indifferent and tolerated reading.

THERE are books which are neither good nor bad, considered in reference to faith and morals. These are works of imagination, of which the subjects have no relation, either to the truths of religion, or the duties of piety. They are read for pastime, and recreation, without expectation of edification for the soul, but at the same time, without the fear of danger. In well regulated families, much attention is not bestowed on this kind of reading. It is an unprofitable sort of amusement—and this is commonly the limit of its censure. However, by a tolerance, which insinuates itself by degrees, and whose increase is rapid, the heads of families have not generally thought it their duty to prohibit absolutely this description of reading. Thus their silence, and habitual usage, appear to authorize them.

But if persons have not sufficient self-command to deny themselves these vain recreations of the mind, at least, they

should be on their guard against the numerous evils and frequent abuses, which are almost inseparable from them.

1st. As soon as they have contracted the taste for reading of this description, they devote too much of their time to it. Of that, for which a few moments ought to suffice, they make a daily, and habitual occupation. For the taste is always accompanied by some degree of passion, and the moment a passion has taken possession of the soul, it observes no bounds.

2dly. The consequence is, they become so devoted to a book which pleases them, that they neglect, for it, their ordinary occupations and duties. They curtail them in part, and perform the rest in a hurry. If during the day they cannot command all the time they desire, they borrow from their sleep during the night; and, provided they can accomplish their gratification, they regard not the time they lose, or their health which they impair.

3dly. What is yet more pernicious, is, that through this vain reading, with which they eagerly feast their imagination, they, by degrees, become disgusted with spiritual books. They read them no longer, but as a task, and that they may not give them up entirely. But hardly have they run their eyes over a few pages, when they return immediately to the others, and devote to them their whole attention. The best works, and those which most abound, not only with religion, but with sense and reason, appear nothing to them in comparison with the former: and, through a fatal turn of mind, into which they have been gradually led, they prefer idle speculations to solid instruction, fictions to truth, and artfully contrived systems to 'that doctrine, which,' as St. Paul speaks, 'is according to piety.'¹

4thly. They even derive from this a species of glory. They pique themselves on their just and nice discernment in appreciating, and criticising well written books. They

commit to memory select passages, which they recite, well or ill, as the case may be, but always with a certain degree of ostentation. They acquire by this means, or aim at acquiring the reputation of persons of talent and extensive reading. Some indeed are jealous of this, who are not ashamed to acknowledge their ignorance of the leading maxims of a spiritual life, and even the fundamental principles of the science of salvation.

SECTION III.

Good and pious reading.

‘As in corporal distempers,’ says Butler,¹ ‘a total loss of appetite, which no medicines can restore, forbodes certain decay and death: so, in the spiritual life of the soul, a neglect or disrelish of pious reading and instruction, is a most fatal symptom:—What hopes can we entertain of a person to whom the science of virtue, and of eternal salvation, doth not seem interesting, or worth his application? It is impossible, says St. Chrysostom, that a man should be saved, who neglects assiduous pious reading or consideration.’

‘By pious reading, the mind is instructed and enlightened, and the affections of the heart are purified and inflamed. It is recommended by St. Paul as the summary of spiritual advice.² Hence the pious are insatiable in this exercise, and, according to the golden motto of Thomas-a-Kempis, they find their chief delight ‘in a closet with a good book.’ Worldly and tepid Christians stand certainly in the utmost need of this help to virtue. The world is a whirlpool of business, pleasure, and sin.—Its torrent is always beating upon their hearts, ready to break in, and bury them under

¹ Preface to the Lives of the Saints.

² 1 Tim. iv. 13.

its flood, unless frequent pious reading and consideration oppose a strong fence to its waves. The more deeply a person is immersed in its tumultuous cares, so much the greater ought to be his solicitude to find leisure to breathe, after the fatigues and dissipation of business and company; to plunge his heart, by secret prayer, in the ocean of the divine immensity, and, by pious reading, to afford his soul some spiritual refection; as the wearied husbandman, from his labor, recruits his spent vigor and exhausted strength, by allowing his body necessary refreshment and repose.'

Two things contribute to render reading useful and salutary: the nature of the book we read, and the manner in which we read it. As to the quality of the book, although there are doubtless some books of piety much better than others, every one, in the choice he makes of them, can consult his own inclination and taste. Some persons prefer books which instruct them,—others those which touch the feelings. Some take more pleasure in histories, and the lives of the saints, which present them examples for imitation; others are attracted by spiritual treatises, which analyze subjects profoundly, and convince them by argument. However this may be, it seems of little consequence to what sort of books we are attached, provided they are good books, that is to say, orthodox, and from which we can derive assistance for our improvement and perfection.

But it is not sufficient to read them: we must read them well; for often every thing depends on the manner, and there is, in undertakings of every kind, a method which makes them more effectual. To read in haste, as though one were running a race, is to incur the risk of remembering nothing; since it is impossible, in that case, to pay sufficient attention. Food taken too greedily and fast, does often more harm to the health than good. To read too much at a time, is to fill the mind with a multitude of ideas, which it cannot arrange, and of which it will retain but a confused and superficial

view. Excess of food, however wholesome, oppresses the stomach and disables it from digesting. To read, for the purpose of remembering certain striking passages, certain new or uncommon thoughts, is to make one's reading a study; now all study, dries and distracts the heart. To read, and linger over the beauty of the style and the purity of the language, is to fall into the opposite extreme, and to amuse one's self with flowers instead of gathering the fruits.

From all this it is easy to conclude how we ought to practise spiritual reading, and what rules we should observe in its performance—we ought,

1st. To address ourselves, in the beginning, to God, and lift up our hearts to him to ask the illumination of his spirit; for it is God alone who 'gives the increase,' especially to his word, whether read or heard.

2d. To read deliberately, and weigh the sentiments well, that they may make a better impression, and insinuate themselves gently into our soul; like the dew which falls drop by drop, and so penetrates the ground.

3d. To read little at a time, accounting as more valuable, a short exercise, performed with reflection, than one which, though longer, is more superficial and ill-digested.

4th. To pause upon certain passages, by which we feel particularly struck; to go over them again and again, to apply them to ourselves, and give the truths which they contain time to sink deeply into our minds and penetrate our hearts. 'If we would read for the spiritual profit of our souls,' says Butler, 'our motive must be a sincere desire of improving ourselves in divine love, in humility, meekness, and other virtues. Curiosity and vanity shut the door of the heart to the Holy Ghost, and stifle in it all affections of piety.—We must make the application of what we read to ourselves, entertain pious affections, and form particular resolutions for the practice of virtue. It is the admonition of a great servant of God: Whatever good instructions you

read, he says, unless you resolve, and effectually endeavor to practise them with your whole heart, you have not read to the benefit of your soul. For knowledge, without works, only accuseth and condemneth.’¹

5th. To read over from time to time certain books which are generally esteemed, and of which we have personally experienced the usefulness, and solidity. It is a mistake, into which many persons allow themselves to fall, to be unwilling to read the same book twice, and to suppose that having pleased on the first perusal, it will be wearisome at the second. A good book is like a rich mine, in which we can always find something worth digging for. If the first reading has been useful to us, the second would be still more beneficial, and every subsequent perusal of the same, would contribute to our improvement.

6th. To select out of what we read one or two pious reflections, with which we are most affected, and renew them often during the day.

7th. It is also a very good practice, in reading pious books, to mark those passages, which make a greater impression upon our minds, and keep them, as it were in reserve, to read them over, when we stand most in need of the sentiments and affections, which they first excited in us.

From these observations, the reader will easily perceive that there is a great resemblance, between spiritual reading and mental prayer. And in fact, these two exercises are so much alike, that to read slowly, to pause, now and then, reflect on what we have read, and apply it to ourselves, is the usual means, by which we acquire the habit of meditation, and become familiar with the ordinary method of mental prayer.

I shall conclude this section with one or two more extracts from Butler, on the reading of the lives of the saints: ‘Whether we consult reason, authority or experience,’ he says,

¹ Preface to the Lives of the Saints.

‘we may boldly affirm, that except the sacred writings, no book has reclaimed so many sinners, or formed so many holy men to perfect virtue, as that of ‘The Lives of the Saints.’¹

‘Though we cannot imitate all the actions of the saints,’ he remarks elsewhere, ‘we can learn from them, to practise humility, patience, and other virtues, in a manner suiting our circumstances, and state of life’—certain actions of some saints, which were performed by a special instinct of the Holy Ghost, are to us rather objects of admiration, than imitation: but even in these, we read lessons of perfect virtue, and a reproach of our own sloth, who dare undertake nothing for God.’

‘Some may say, what edification can persons in the world reap from the lives of apostles, bishops, and recluses? To this it may be answered, that though the functions of their state differ from ours, yet, patience, humility, penance, zeal, and charity, which all their actions breathe, are necessary virtues in all persons. Christian perfection is, in its spirit and essence, every where the same, how much soever the means or exercises may vary.’²

1 Preface to the Lives of the Saints.

2 Introd. Discourse.

CHAPTER VII.

ON EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.

SECTION I.

The importance of the examination of conscience.

EXAMINATION of conscience is considered by the saints, one of the most efficacious means to promote our spiritual advancement, and they all unite in recommending its practice. St. Chrysostom, writing upon these words of the psalmist, 'The things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds,'¹ affirms that we should examine our conscience every night: Because, says he, we shall thereby be induced to be more careful, the next day, to guard against committing the same faults, of which we found we were guilty, the day before; and the thought that we have to examine, at night, what we do during the day, will cause us to watch over ourselves with greater diligence. As merchants carefully set down their gains and losses, compute them daily, and endeavor to account to themselves for both, with a view to increase the former, and retrieve the latter; so, in like manner, we should daily take notice of the spiritual losses we sustain in the momentous affair of our salvation, strive to repair them, and adopt the means by which we may be able to add to the small stock of virtues and good works, which we have already acquired.

Another great advantage of the daily examination of our conscience is, that, when made diligently, it extirpates bad habits, and prevents vice from taking root in our hearts.

The case is very different with those who omit to examine themselves daily, or do it negligently. Well might we say of them, in the language of scripture, 'They have not known nor understood, they walk in darkness'—they know not where they fall.'² Again, 'Where there is no knowledge of the soul,' says the wise man, 'there is no good.'³ The saints compare the conscience of such persons to 'the field of the slothful man, and the vineyard of the foolish man,' which Solomon saw 'all filled with nettles, and covered with thorns.'⁴

St. Ignatius set so much value on frequent examination of conscience, that he preferred it, in some measure, even to mental prayer. He not only prescribed it to all the members of the society of which he was the founder, but he wished that those among them who were employed in the functions of the holy ministry, should strenuously recommend its practice to all persons who put themselves under their spiritual care.

SECTION II.

Two sorts of examination of conscience.

THERE are two sorts of examination of conscience: one general, the other particular.

I. The general examination of conscience is a review of our conduct, to discover all the sins of which we have been guilty, in thoughts, words, actions, and omissions, within a certain period of time. It contains five points.

1. We must call to mind the benefits which we have received from God, both general and particular, and testify our gratitude for them, by fervent acts of thanksgiving—We begin thus, in order that the consideration of God's good-

1 Ps. lxxxi. 5. 2 Prov. iv. 19. 3 Prov. xix. 2. 4 Prov. xxiv. 30. 31.

ness and mercy, may excite in us a greater sorrow for the sins of which we find ourselves guilty in our examination.

2. We must earnestly beg of God light and grace, to know and detest our sins.

3. We must carefully examine our consciences,—endeavoring to call to mind all the sins which we have committed in thoughts, words, actions and omissions, ever since our last examination, or from the time that we have to make our general examination.

4. We must beg God's pardon for the sins of which we find ourselves guilty, and detest them from the bottom of our heart.

5. We must make a firm purpose of amendment,—resolving, with the help of divine grace, never more to commit them, and to do all we can to atone for them.

II. Particular examination, which the saints recommend as one of the principal means of perfection, is an exact search not only into the sins, but the least faults that relate to one vice, one virtue, or some other particular subject. The object we should have in view in making it, is, to correct ourselves of our faults, and become, as much as possible, irreprehensible before God and men.

In the choice of the subject of our particular examination, we ought to be directed by our confessor, who will also be the best judge of the length of time during which we should continue it upon the same subject. In general, we should choose among our habitual failings, passions, or vices, that which has the greatest influence upon our whole conduct, which exposes us to the greatest danger, and is, on this account, the greatest obstacle to our salvation and perfection. This once ascertained, we should take this failing, passion, or vice, for the subject of our daily particular examination, till such a time as we have obtained a complete victory over it—offering to God our prayers, meditations, confessions, communions, and other exercises of piety for that end.

The better to show the nature and object of this efficacious means of perfection, I shall subjoin several examples of its practical application to different subjects.

Particular examination on faith.

1. Is your faith true, and sincere?

Do you believe all revealed truths, without any exception?

Do you believe them firmly, and without hesitation?

Do you believe them from the true motive of faith, namely, because God has revealed them to his church, that teaches them to us?

Upon this principle, do you believe, equally, all the truths which the church believes and teaches, whether they be repugnant or not to the notions that might arise in your mind from the suggestions of corrupt nature, self-love, pride, early prejudices, or any other source of error?

2. Do you profess your faith, before God and men, by your thoughts, words, and actions?

When thoughts contrary to faith arise in your mind, do you endeavor to banish them, and 'bring your understanding into captivity to the obedience of Christ,'¹ the author and finisher of our faith,²—saying to him, 'I do believe, Lord! help thou my unbelief.'³

Have you not, by your silence, or equivocal mode of speaking on the truths of faith, when they have been questioned or denied in your presence, given others reason to suspect that you did not believe them firmly?

Are you not one of those who 'are ashamed of the gospel,' and 'detain the truth of God in injustice,' who, through human respect, or some other bad principle, dare not advocate the maxims of religion before persons who attack them?

Have you not sometimes been ashamed to practise your religion—omitting to say your prayers, grace before and

1 2 Cor. x. 5.

2 Heb. xii. 2.

3 Mark ix. 23.

after meals, and even to make the sign of the cross, in the presence of others?

3. Do you view every thing in the light of faith?

Do you judge of the evils and good things of this life by the principles of faith, and not according to the maxims of the world? Are your joy and grief caused, not by what you see, but by what you believe?

In trying circumstances, difficulties, and doubts, do you let faith preside over your determinations, and regulate your conduct?

In the ordinary occurrences of life, even in the discharge of your duties, in the practice of virtue, &c. are you actuated by motives of faith, and not merely led by habit, or by natural and human motives?

In a word, do you 'live by faith,' which is the life of the just in this land of pilgrimage?¹

Particular examination on hope.

Are you persuaded that God wishes you to be saved, and that he will give you all the graces necessary for it?

In times of temptation and spiritual aridities, do you not give way to melancholy feelings, falsely imagining that God has forsaken you? Are you, on the contrary, fully persuaded, that he will never suffer you to be tempted above your strength, and that he will never abandon you, if you do not yourself abandon him first?

After having been guilty of some great transgression, or frequently relapsed into the same faults, have you not continued in the state of sin, either through despair of God's pardon, or presumption on his mercy?

Particular examination on confidence in God.

A Christian who is well grounded in this virtue, relies entirely upon the goodness and mercy of God, both for the time being, and for the time to come.

He does not depend upon the favor and protection of men; and if he sometimes uses their assistance, he never courts it with anxiety, nor is he disturbed, when they refuse it to him.

He would see himself destitute of friends, and exposed to the frowns of the world, without being dismayed or disconcerted. 'The Lord is the protector of my life,' said the psalmist, 'of whom shall I be afraid?'¹—'Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me.'²

The fear of wanting health, talents, or means, does not prevent him from undertaking what duty requires of him.

He does not fear to be deprived of the necessities of life; for he knows that they will never be wanting to him who serves God faithfully.

In the management of his temporal affairs, he proceeds with as much care as if all the success depended upon him; and yet, he expects it only from the blessing, which he hopes God will give to his exertions.

He does not even rely upon the spiritual means of salvation and perfection, which he may happen actually to enjoy, but upon God, who placed them within his reach—so that if he be deprived of them, he humbly submits to the dispensation of heaven, and experiences no abatement in his fervor and devotion.

Finally, in all his wants, either for body or soul, he looks to God for assistance and protection.

Particular examination on the love of God.

1. Do you love God *purely*, that is, because he is infinitely good, perfect and deserving of all love?

When you have loved him, because he is good, has it not been, only, because he is good to you, because he promises you great rewards in heaven?

¹ Ps. xvi. 1.

² Ps. xxii. 4.

When you have said that you loved him for himself, because of his infinite perfections, has your heart been in accordance with your tongue?

Do you love God *above all things*, that is, more than all the goods of this life, more than any person, more than yourself?

Do you prefer his service to all the riches, honors, and pleasures of this world?

Would you be ready to sacrifice your own pleasure, your health, and even your life, rather than to lose his grace by sin?

Do you love God *with your whole heart*, so that you love nothing but in him, and for his sake?

With your whole mind—being delighted to think of him, and of the means of pleasing him in all things?

With your whole soul—submitting to him all its faculties, after the example of the royal prophet, who said, ‘Shall not my soul be subject to God?’¹

With your whole strength—sparing yourself no trouble, minding no difficulty, when the will of God requires you to act?

2. Is the love you have for God such, that you wish only what he wishes, desire what he desires, love what he loves, hate what he hates?

Do you resign yourself with joy to the dispensations of his providence, in all things?

Do you rejoice when you see, or hear of persons who serve God faithfully and love him with all their heart?

Do you, on the contrary, grieve, when he is offended, and endeavor to make some amends for the transgressions of others, by your piety and fervor?

Particular examination on the love of our neighbor.

Have you rejoiced at your neighbor's happiness, and grieved at his misfortune?

Are you always willing and ready to do good to him, whenever you have it in your power to do so?

In your intercourse with him, do you show proper regard for his opinions and sentiments, take care not to hurt his feelings, and try, 'as much as it is in you, to have peace with all men?'¹

Do you take care not to speak, nor to listen to those who speak of the faults of others, unless duty compels you?

In a word, do you fulfil in regard to your neighbor the two great rules laid down in holy scripture: 'Never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another;' ² and—'As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner?' ³

Is not your conduct towards your neighbor regulated by your own interest, your feelings, and inclination?

Is it not, on this account, that you seek his company, enter into his views, approve his principles, praise him, and take his part, on every occasion, even against your better judgment, and perhaps against your conscience?

Do you love him for God's sake, independently of his amiable qualities, and kindness to you—remembering these words of the gospel: 'if you love those that love you, what reward shall you have?' ⁴

Have you borne patiently with the imperfections of others, treating them with the same kindness that you expect from them—following the rule given by St. Paul: 'Bear ye one another's burdens; and so shall you fulfil the law of Christ?' ⁵

When your friends have communicated to you, what they called just causes of complaint against certain persons, have

1 Rom. xii. 18.

3 Luke vi. 31.

5 Gal. vi. 2.

2 Tob. iv. 16.

4 Mat. v. 46.

you done all you could to soothe their minds, and pacify them?

Have you carefully avoided suspicions, injurious to your neighbor, rash judgments, and detraction?

When you have thought that some one had spoken, or acted unkindly with regard to you, have you not falsely imagined that you were authorized to retaliate; instead of following the precept of St. Paul: 'Render no man evil for evil, be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good?'

Particular examination on our actions in general.

Have we taken great care to perform our actions *in the state of grace*, without which they are dead, and none of them, not even the best, can procure us heaven?

Have we offered them to God, and performed them in conformity to his will, and for his glory?

Knowing that God, being the first principle of all his creatures, ought to be their last end, have we reflected that we transgress this indispensable rule, not only by acting with a bad intention, but also when our intentions are neither good nor bad, and when we act without any intention?

Upon this principle, 1. Have we rejected all bad intentions? 2. Have we avoided acting from motives merely human, morally good, but not supernatural? 3. Have we guarded against acting, through habit, without attention, and, as it were, by rote?

Have we made use of the four means which the saints recommend, as most efficient to induce us to do all our actions well, viz.

To remember the presence of God;

To perform every one of them, as if we were to die immediately after it;

To bear in mind the account which we shall have to give God for it;

To consider the reward or the punishment, which will follow it?

Particular examination on our daily religious duties.

Do you rise at a regular hour, and not too late in the morning?

Do you rise every day at the appointed time, without unnecessary delay?

Do you give your first thought to God, adore his divine majesty, and offer yourself to him, to do his will in all things, after the example of Christ, who, 'coming into the world said: behold! I come to do thy will, O God?'¹

Are you careful never to omit saying your morning prayers, before you apply to your usual occupations?

Do you endeavor to hear mass every morning?

Are you punctual in performing the spiritual exercises, which you have prescribed to yourself, with the approbation of your spiritual director; such as meditation, pious reading, beads, &c.?

Before going to bed, do you say your night prayers, examine your conscience, and place yourself in the state in which you would wish to be at the hour of your death?

After your night prayers, do you avoid all unnecessary talk, and occupation?

Is God the object of your last thought; and the sign of the cross your last action, before you compose yourself to sleep, as it ought to have been the first thing you did, when you awoke in the morning?

Particular examination on hearing mass.

Have you heard mass as often as you might possibly have done, and always from a pure and religious motive?

Have you not heard it through habit, and because others did so, with whom you lived, or in whose company you happened to be?

For the sake of pleasing some persons, and obtaining the good opinion of others?

Through hypocrisy, human respect, or interest?

Has it been to worship God, and adore all his divine perfections, which cannot be worthily adored, but by the holy victim that is offered on our altars?

To acknowledge the divine goodness of God towards you, and give him thanks for all the blessings which he bestows daily upon all his creatures?

To appease his wrath, satisfy his justice, and atone for your sins, through the infinite merits of Jesus Christ?

To beg of God some particular grace and favor, either for yourself or others, knowing that there is none, though ever so great, but can be obtained through Christ, who offers himself to his father, in this sacrifice, for all the wants of his church?

During mass, have you manifested, by your external deportment, a high sense of religion, a profound humility, and a lively faith of the presence of God?

Have you cherished in your heart the sentiments of piety and religion, which are becoming during the celebration of these holy mysteries,—whilst ‘the Lamb, who taketh away the sins of the world,’ is laid upon the altar, for the living and the dead?

Have you been penetrated with a deep sense of your unworthiness, and sorrow for your sins? with submission to the will of God, confidence in his mercy, gratitude for his blessings, and love for his goodness?

Particular examination on confession.

Do you consider confession, not only as necessary to obtain the pardon of those sins, by which we lose the grace of God, but also as a most efficacious means to preserve and increase it; to acquire the knowledge of ourselves; to foresee and guard against the occasions of sin, to which we

may be exposed; to prevent our imperfections from growing into inveterate, and perhaps incurable habits?

Have you looked upon frequent confession as being, in the ordinary course of divine providence, an indispensable means to arrive at christian perfection?

Have you, therefore, had recourse to it, not only whenever you had just cause to suppose yourself guilty of mortal sin—not neglecting it, even then, through fear, shame, or perhaps worse motives—but, as often as the particular wants of your soul required it, according to the advice of a prudent and enlightened director?

Have you not shared in the error of those who neglect going to confession, when they are in trouble, or find themselves exposed to peculiar, though unavoidable temptations; not being willing to understand that you were, under such circumstances, in greater need of this means of salvation, and, perhaps, strictly bound to have recourse to it?

When you have been to confession, has your examination of conscience been diligent and strict?

Your contrition, interior, supernatural, supreme, and universal?

The recital of your sins, entire, plain, undisguised, prudent, and modest?

Have you performed your penance, at the time, and in the manner, prescribed by your confessor?

Particular examination on holy communion.

1. Have you a great desire to communicate often, and is this desire regulated by the advice of a prudent and pious director?

Does this desire cause you to lead a life of innocence and piety? or, to use the words of St. Austin, ‘do you live so, as to deserve to communicate daily?’

2. Are you led to the sacred table, by a pure and holy intention?

Do you communicate, to comply with the desire which our Lord has to give himself to you?

To establish his reign in your heart, and make him master of your affections?

To obtain an increase of sanctifying grace, which may enable you to make daily progress in christian perfection, and persevere in God's service and love, to the end of your life?

To obtain the particular graces and favors, you stand in need of, according to the peculiar wants of your soul, and the circumstances in which you may happen to be placed—such as :

Patience, in your troubles and afflictions?

Meekness, forbearance, and charity?

The spirit of prayer, the love of retirement and solitude?

The grace to shun pride, vanity, idle curiosity, and other particular faults or imperfections, to which you may be naturally prone?

3. In your preparation before communion, and during your thanksgiving, have you performed the acts of faith, humility, adoration, love, &c. which are generally laid down in all approved prayer-books?

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

SECTION I.

Importance and advantages of the exercise of the presence of God.

‘SEEK ye the Lord, and be strengthened: seek his face evermore.’¹ To seek the face of God, is to walk in his presence, by directing all the desires and affections of our heart towards him. St. Bonaventure says, that he who is continually employed in the exercise of the presence of God, begins in this life to enjoy the felicity of the blessed. It is true, we cannot whilst we are on this earth, see him, as they do, clearly, and such as he is; but we can at least place ourselves incessantly in his presence, by acts of adoration and love. For God who created us to enjoy him eternally in heaven, wishes us to have, in this life, a foretaste of that happiness, by always walking in his presence, always adoring him, and always beholding him through the obscurity of faith. ‘We see now, through a glass,’ says St. Paul, ‘in an obscure manner; but then, face to face.’²

The angels who are appointed to guard and defend us, discharge this duty in such a manner, as never to lose sight of God. ‘They always see the face of my Father, who is in heaven,’ says our Lord Jesus Christ.³ These pure spirits feast on the beatific vision of the divine attributes—‘I seemed, indeed, to eat and to drink with you,’ said the

1 Ps. civ. 4.

2 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

3 Mat. xviii. 10.

angel Raphael to Tobias, 'but I use an invisible meat and drink, which cannot be seen by men'¹—let us endeavor to imitate them in this. Although, whilst we are eating or conversing with men, it appears that we have no other food, or conversation; let us, however, strive to take an invisible food, and to hold a conversation which they may not be able to hear. This invisible food and internal conversation consist in always beholding and loving God, and in doing his will in all things. 'I have food to eat which you know not of,' said Christ to his disciples;²—'My food is to do the will of him that sent me.'³ St. Paul writes to the Philippians, 'Our conversation is in heaven';⁴ and to the Corinthians, 'We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.'⁵

The saints of the Old Testament took particular care always to walk in the presence of God. Thus, the royal prophet did not content himself with 'giving praise to him seven times a day';⁶—'I set the Lord always in my sight,' he says, 'for he is at my right hand, that I be not moved.'⁷ The exercise of God's presence was so familiar to these holy men, that it was a mode of speaking usual with them to say, 'The Lord liveth—in whose sight I stand.'⁸ Their extreme attention to this practice, proceeded, undoubtedly, from a knowledge of the great advantage which they derived from it. 'Blessed is the man,' says Jesus, the son of Sirach, 'that shall continue in wisdom—and in his mind, shall think of the all seeing eye of God.'⁹ This thought alone, is sufficient to induce us to watch over ourselves, with the greatest care and diligence. 'I feared all my works,' says Job, 'knowing that thou didst not spare the offender.'¹⁰

1 Tob. xii. 19.

5 2 Cor. iv. 18.

9 Eccl. xiv. 22.

2 John iv. 32.

6 Ps. cxviii. 164.

10 Chap. ix. 28.

3 John iv. 34.

7 Ps. xv. 8.

4 Chap. iii. 20.

8 3 Kings xvii. 1.

If the presence of a person, whom we respect and fear, is often sufficient to keep us within the line of our duty,—what salutary effect may we not expect from the thought of the presence of God, from whom nothing can be concealed! What can be conceived more efficacious to enable us to repress the impetuosity of our passions, to surmount the most violent temptations, and to stand firm on the most dangerous occasions, than to say to ourselves: I am in the presence of my judge, who will condemn me, if I commit this fault? To sin against God, says St. Austin, is a crime; but to sin against God, in the very sight of God, is an enormity of which few would become guilty, if they were to pause, in time, and say: God sees me. On the contrary, the habitual forgetfulness of God, in which the sinner lives, is one of the principal causes of his manifold transgressions: ‘God is not before his eyes,’ says the psalmist; ‘his ways are filthy, at all times.’¹

St. Jerom, in his comments upon the 22d chapter of Ezekiel, after a long enumeration of the crimes of the ungrateful Jerusalem, assigns her having forgotten God, as the cause of all the sins into which she fell. And, in truth, as a lively sense of God’s presence, is the best preservative against sin, and a most powerful stimulus to the practice of all virtues, so, a criminal forgetfulness of his divine majesty, paves the way to every vice. The one, raises to perfection; the other, debases to crime. ‘O Lord! the hope of Israel,’ exclaims Jeremias, ‘all that forsake thee shall be confounded; because they have forsaken the vein of living waters.’² ‘Ask among the nations,’ says the Lord, by the same prophet: ‘Who hath heard such horrible things as the virgin of Israel hath done to excess?—because my people have forgotten me.’³

The exercise of the presence of God is the sovereign and universal remedy, which St. Basil prescribes to overcome

1 Ps. ix. 25. 2 Chap. xvii. 13. 3 Chap. xviii. 13. 15.

all temptations,—a short and easy means to become perfect; a means, which possesses the force and efficacy of all the others. God himself taught it to Abraham: ‘Walk before me,’ said he to him, ‘and *be perfect*,’¹ that is, ‘and *thou wilt be perfect*,’ for here, as in several other passages of scripture, the future is expressed by the imperative, the better to show the infallibility of the success. ‘True perfection,’ says Bourdaloue, ‘consists in doing every thing well;—not with carelessness and indifference, but with attention and fervor. Now, is there any thing better calculated to impart to me that fervor and zeal in all my actions, to rouse me from my torpor and supineness, than the thought of God’s presence? This thought is moreover a source of consolation for the pious, and a support amid the difficulties which they encounter in the pursuit of christian perfection. What can be more sweet than this thought,—God is with me, he cares for me, he protects me? Is it not alone sufficient to comfort and strengthen me in all my troubles?’ ‘Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death,’ says holy David, ‘I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.’² ‘Let the just rejoice before God, and be delighted with gladness.’³

St. Ambrose and St. Bernard remark, that as there is not a moment, in which we do not experience the effects of God’s mercy and goodness; so we should not let a moment pass, without remembering his presence. Whilst you are doing, or thinking on any thing, adds St. Bernard, remember that God is present; and be persuaded that you have lost all the time, in which you were not mindful of his presence. St. Austin, in his comments on these words of the psalmist, ‘I will fix my eyes upon thee,’⁴ exclaims: Yes, O my God! I will never withdraw my eyes from thee, for thou never withdrawest thine from me; I will follow the example of thy prophet, ‘my eyes shall ever be towards the Lord.’⁵

1 Gen. xvii. 1.

3 Ps. lxvii. 4.

5 Ps. xxiv. 15.

2 Ps. xxii. 4.

4 Ps. xxxi. 8.

The masters of a spiritual life use the following comparison, to show the need we have of always remembering God's presence. As the planets, they say, receive from the sun all the light and splendor, with which they revolve conspicuous among the celestial spheres; so the just,—who are destined 'to shine as the brightness of the firmament, for all eternity,'¹ who, whilst yet 'in the midst of a depraved and perverse generation, shine as lights in the world,'²—must needs derive from the presence of God, and the constant union of their hearts with him, all the supernatural lights, which display themselves in their conduct before men, 'who seeing their good works, glorify their Father who is in heaven.'³

SECTION II.

The practice of the exercise of God's presence.

THE exercise of the presence of God, includes two sorts of acts—the acts of the understanding, and those of the will.

The acts of the understanding consist in considering, that God is present every where; that he fills the whole universe; that he is all in all;—all in every part of creation, and in every creature. 'He is not far from every one of us,' says St. Paul; 'for in him we live, and we move, and we are.'⁴ God is within us: it is he, who imparts life, to all that lives; motion, to all that moves; existence, to all that exists. And not only is God present every where; but he sees all things, he observes all things. We should therefore consider him as a constant witness to all our words, thoughts, and actions: 'reaching into the division of the soul and the spirit—a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart, to whose

1 Dan. xii. 3. 2 Philip. ii. 15. 3 Mat. v. 14. 4 Acts xvii. 27. 28.

eyes, all things are naked and open.’¹ ‘Whither shall I flee from thy face?’ exclaims the psalmist; ‘if I ascend into heaven, thou art there; if I descend into hell, thou art present. If I take my wings early in the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also shall thy hand lead me; and thy right hand shall hold me. And I said, perhaps darkness shall cover me,—but darkness shall not be dark to thee; and night shall be light as the day.’²

‘The eyes of the Lord are far brighter than the sun, beholding round about all the ways of men, and the bottom of the deep, and looking into the hearts of men.’³

‘The Lord of Hosts is thy name: great in counsel, and incomprehensible in thought: whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the children of Adam, to render unto every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his devices.’⁴

Some persons, when they place themselves in the presence of God, represent him to their minds as standing by them, or walking along with them, and looking at them; others view him on the cross, tied at the pillar, in the garden of olives, or in some other mystery of his life. All this is good, if properly done; but generally speaking, these sorts of representations and sensible images are apt to wear out the mind, and fatigue the head. The use of the understanding in the exercise of God’s presence of which I speak here, is entirely free from these mental fictions. It consists in a simple view of the presence of God, such as faith gives us, without any effort of imagination.

The acts of the will, which constitute the principal part of the exercise of God’s presence, consist in ardent desires of the soul to unite itself to God, by perfect charity, and in frequent aspirations by which it raises itself to him. These pious affections and emotions are expressed by short and

1 Heb. iv. 12. 13.

2 Ps. cxxxviii. 7—12.

3 Eccl. xxiii. 28.

4 Jerem. xxxii. 18. 19.

fervent prayers, which the saints call ejaculations. Cassian explains the use of this mode of prayer by these words of the royal prophet, which the church repeats at the beginning of all the canonical hours: 'O God! come to my assistance; O Lord! make haste to help me.'¹ Are we about to undertake any thing important, or arduous?—let us beg God's grace by this prayer, that we may succeed in doing it well; and, as in all things we stand in need of his assistance, let us be sure to have recourse to him continually. This text is well calculated to express our feelings, in every state of mind in which we may find ourselves. By it, we invoke the divine aid, humble ourselves, and acknowledge our wants; we raise our hearts to God, confide in his goodness, rely on his care, and are prompted to love him, as our protector and our refuge. Finally, in the spiritual war, which we have to carry on against the enemies of our souls, we shall find in these words, an impenetrable shield, a safe armour, and a strong rampart.

St. Basil makes the exercise of the presence of God consist in taking occasion from every thing to raise our hearts and minds to Him, 'by whom all things were made';² 'who stretched out the heavens like a pavilion, and founded the earth upon its own bases.'³ The psalms of David bear witness, how familiar he must have been with its practice:

'I meditated on all thy works; I meditated upon the works of thy hands.'⁴

'How great are thy works, O Lord! thou hast made all things in wisdom; the earth is filled with thy riches.'⁵

'The heavens shew forth the glory of God, and the firmament declareth the works of his hands. Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night sheweth knowledge.'⁶

1 Ps. lxi. 2.

3 Ps. ciii. 2. 5.

5 Ps. ciii. 24.

2 John i. 3.

4 Ps. cxlii. 5.

6 Ps. xviii. 2. 3.

‘In the beginning, O Lord ! thou foundedst the earth : and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest : and all of them shall grow old as a garment : and as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art always the self-same, and thy years shall not fail.’¹

‘The Lord is sweet to all : and his tender mercies are over all his works.—The Lord is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works.’²

The aspirations and ejaculations of which we speak, may be considered with reference to the three states or ways, which ascetic writers distinguish in a spiritual life, and call the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive way. According to this division, the aspirations which belong to the purgative way, consist in begging God’s pardon for our sins, in purifying our heart from vice, and withdrawing it from all criminal affections to creatures. The acquisition of christian virtues, the victory over our temptations, and the grace to know and do the will of God in all things, are the object of our aspirations, when we are in the way called illuminative. Those who have attained to the perfection of the unitive way, endeavor, by constant elevations of their souls to God, to be inseparably united to him by perfect charity. But, whatever ground there may be for this distinction; we ought not however to confine ourselves to those affections and aspirations, which seem to belong more properly to any one of these three states or ways. Those which our love for God will suggest to us, without any study, are the best and most useful. Nor is it necessary to use many different ones : the frequent, and fervent repetition of the same aspiration, may suffice to render us attentive to the divine presence, for months, and years. Thus, if we find that we derive great benefit from certain aspirations,

1 Ps. ci. 26. 27. 28.

2 Ps. cxliv. 9. 17.

let us not look for others; but devoutly and constantly employ them, as a most efficacious means to walk in the presence of God.

SECTION III.

The exercise of God's presence exemplified in devout aspirations and fervent ejaculations, taken from holy scripture, which may also serve as subjects of meditation throughout the day.

When we rise in the morning.

'O God! my God, to thee do I watch at the break of day; I have remembered thee upon my bed; I will meditate on thee, in the morning.'¹

'My soul hath desired thee in the night;—in the morning early, I will watch to thee.'²

'My heart is ready, O God! my heart is ready.'³ Conduct me, O Lord! in thy justice,—direct my way in thy sight.⁴ Conduct me, O Lord! in thy way, and I will walk in thy truth.'⁵

'Make the way known to me, wherein I should walk. Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God,⁶—my portion in the land of the living.'⁷

During mental prayer.

'The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him; to all that call upon him in truth. He will do the will of them that fear him; and he will hear their prayer, and save them.'⁸

1 Ps. lxii. 2. 7.

2 Isaiah xxvi. 9.

3 Ps. lvi. 8.

4 Ps. v. 9.

5 Ps. lxxv. 11.

6 Ps. cxlii. 8. 10.

7 Ps. cxli. 6.

8 Ps. cxliv. 18. 19.

‘As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters; so my soul panteth after thee, O God!’¹

‘Speak, Lord! for thy servant heareth.’²

‘I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me.’³ And whether it be truly he, who speaks, we can judge by what the prophet adds: ‘for he will speak peace unto his people, and unto his saints, and unto them that are converted to the heart.’ When God speaks, his voice conveys peace, hope, and comfort to the soul. ‘I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of affliction.’⁴

‘You shall pray to me, and I will hear you. You shall seek me, and shall find me, when you shall seek me with all your heart.’⁵

To obtain the pardon of our sins.

‘I have sinned, what shall I do, O keeper of men!—I am become burdensome to myself.’⁶

‘Wo to us! because we have sinned;—therefore is our heart sorrowful.—Convert us, O Lord! to thee; and we shall be converted: renew our days, as from the beginning.’⁷

‘I will rise, and I will go to my father, and say to him: Father! I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.’⁸

‘Cast me not away from thy face; and take not thy holy spirit from me.’⁹

‘O! let thy mercy be for my comfort;—let thy tender mercies come unto me, and I shall live.’¹⁰

‘Who can understand sins? from my secret ones, cleanse me, O Lord!’¹¹

1 Ps. xli. 2.

5 Jerem. xxix. 12. 13.

9 Ps. l. 13.

2 1 Kings iii. 10.

6 Job vii. 20.

10 Ps. cxviii. 76. 77.

3 Ps. lxxxiv. 9.

7 Lament. v. 16. 17. 21.

11 Ps. xviii. 13.

4 Jerem. xxix. 11.

8 Luke xv. 18.

To give thanks to God for our conversion, and animate ourselves to remain faithful to him.

‘I have risen up, because the Lord hath protected me.¹ He sent from on high, and took me, and received me.’²

‘He hath led me on paths of justice, for his own name’s sake.’³

‘Blessed be the Lord; for he has shewn his wonderful mercy to me.’⁴

‘With expectation I have waited for the Lord; and he was attentive to me. And he heard my prayer, and brought me out of the pit of misery and the mire of dregs; and he set my feet upon a rock, and directed my steps.’⁵

‘I will praise thee, O Lord, my God! with my whole heart; and I will glorify thy name for ever: for thy mercy is great towards me.’⁶

‘Bless the Lord, O my soul! and never forget all he hath done for thee.’⁷

‘The right hand of the Lord hath exalted me,—I shall not die, but live; and I shall declare the works of the Lord.’⁸

‘I will bless the Lord, who hath given me understanding. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life.⁹—Thou art the God of my heart,—my portion forever.’¹⁰

Against the censure and obloquy of worldlings.

‘Sinners have laid a snare for me; but I have not erred from thy precepts.’¹¹

‘The sinner shall watch the just man; and shall gnash upon him with his teeth,—but the Lord shall not leave him in his hands; nor condemn him, when he shall be judged.’¹²

1 Ps. iii. 6.

2 Ps. xvii. 17.

3 Ps. xxii. 3.

4 Ps. xxx. 22.

5 Ps. xxxix. 2. 3.

6 Ps. lxxxv. 12. 13.

7 Ps. cii. 2.

8 Ps. cxvii. 16. 17.

9 Ps. xv. 7. 11.

10 Ps. lxxii. 26.

11 Ps. cxviii. 110.

12 Ps. xxxvi. 12. 23.

‘They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; the venom of asps is under their lips.’¹ They have compassed me about with works of hatred.—They will curse, and thou wilt bless.’²

‘They that render evil for good, have detracted me, because I followed goodness. Attend unto my help, O Lord! the God of my salvation.’³

‘The wicked have told me fables; but not as thy law.’⁴

‘Let them alone; they are blind, and leaders of the blind.’⁵

To confide in God, in our troubles and afflictions.

‘Cast thy care upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall not suffer the just to waver forever.’⁶

‘Come to me all you that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you;—and you shall find rest to your souls.’⁷

‘Expect the Lord, do manfully, and let thy heart take courage, and wait thou for the Lord.’⁸

‘Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart,—then, shalt thou walk confidently in thy way. If thou sleep, thou shalt not fear; thou shalt rest, and thy sleep shall be sweet. Be not afraid of sudden fear; nor of the power of the wicked falling upon thee, for the Lord will be at thy side.’⁹

‘If God be for us, who is against us.’¹⁰

‘The Lord is my helper: I will not fear what man can do to me.’¹¹

‘Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad.’¹²

‘In thee, O Lord! have I hoped; let me never be confounded. I have hoped in the Lord: I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy.’¹³

1 Ps. cxxxix 4.

2 Ps. cviii. 3. 23.

3 Ps. xxxvii. 21. 23.

4 Ps. cxviii. 85.

5 Mat. xv. 14.

6 Ps. xlv. 23.

7 Mat. xi. 28. 29.

8 Ps. xxvi. 14.

9 Prov. iii. 5. 23—26.

10 Rom. viii. 31.

11 Ps. cxvii. 6.

12 Prov. xii. 21.

13 Ps. xxx. 2. 7. 8.

On withdrawing our affections from the world, and the enjoyments of this life.

‘I have seen all things that are done under the sun; and behold! all is vanity and vexation of spirit.’¹

‘What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’²

‘The time is short: it remaineth, that they who use this world, be as if they used it not; for the figure of this world passeth away.’³

‘Love not the world, nor those things which are in the world;—all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.—The world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof.’⁴

‘I have seen the wicked highly exalted, and lifted up like the cedars of Libanus;—I passed by, and lo! he was not;—I sought him, and his place was not found.’⁵

‘When he shall die, he shall take nothing away; nor shall his glory descend with him.’⁶

‘They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell.’⁷

‘No man can serve two masters.’⁸

‘Know you not that the friendship of this world, is the enemy of God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend to this world, becometh an enemy to God.’⁹

‘Be not conformed to this world.’¹⁰ The whole world is seated in wickedness.’¹¹

‘Here, we have no permanent city; but we seek one to come.’¹²

‘Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; mind the things that are above, not

1 Eccl. i. 14.

2 Mat. xvi. 26.

3 1 Cor. vii. 29. 31.

4 1 John ii. 15. 16. 17.

5 Ps xxxvi. 35. 36.

6 Ps. xlviii. 18.

7 Job xxi. 13.

8 Mat. vi. 24.

9 James iv. 4.

10 Rom. xii. 2.

11 1 John v. 19.

12 Heb. xiii. 14.

the things that are on the earth.—When Christ shall appear, who is our life, then shall we also appear with him in glory.’¹

Against the temptations of diffidence and pusillanimity, which the most pious sometimes experience in the practice of virtue.

‘The Lord is at my right hand, that I be not moved; therefore my heart hath been glad.’²

‘O my God! enlighten my darkness; for by thee, I shall be delivered from temptation.’³

‘Though I shall walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for thou art with me.’⁴

‘Prove me, O Lord! and try me,—for thy mercy is always before my eyes.’⁵—I will always hope; and I will add to all thy praise.’⁶

‘He shall cry to me, and I will hear him: I am with him in tribulation; I will deliver him, and I will glorify him.’⁷

‘Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith?’⁸—God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able.’⁹

‘Have a good heart: it is I,—fear not.’¹⁰—My grace is sufficient for thee.’¹¹

‘In the world you shall have distress; but have confidence: I have overcome the world.’¹²

When we have met with humiliation.

‘Before I was humbled, I offended.—It is good for me that thou hast humbled me, that I may learn thy justifications.’¹³

‘I know, O Lord! that thy judgments are equity; and, in thy truth, thou hast humbled me.’¹⁴

1 Colos. iii. 1. 2. 4.

2 Ps. xv. 8. 9.

3 Ps. xvii. 29. 30.

4 Ps. xxii. 4.

5 Ps. xxv. 2.

6 Ps. lxx. 14.

7 Ps. xc. 15.

8 Mat. viii. 26.

9 1 Cor. x. 13.

10 Mark vi. 50.

11 2 Cor. xii. 9.

12 John xvi. 33.

13 Ps. cxviii. 67. 71.

14 Ps. cxviii. 75.

‘In thy humiliation, keep patience; for gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.’¹

On humility and pride.

‘Not to us, O Lord! not to us; but to thy name give glory.’²

‘Every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.’³

‘Pride goeth before destruction; and the spirit is lifted up, before a fall.’⁴

‘God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.’

‘Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind, or in thy words; for from it, all perdition took its beginning.’⁶

‘When you shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say; we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do.’⁷

‘What hast thou, that thou hast not received? and, if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?’⁸

‘Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls.’⁹

‘Let nothing be done through strife, nor by vain glory; but in humility, let each esteem others better than themselves.—Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.’¹⁰

‘Let another praise thee, and not thy own mouth; a stranger, and not thy own lips.’¹¹

‘Be not high-minded’¹²—Be not wise in your own conceits.’¹³

1 Eccl. ii. 5.

6 Tob. iv. 14.

10 Phil. ii. 3. 5. 8.

2 Ps. cxiii. 1.

7 Luke xvii. 10.

11 Prov. xxvii. 2.

3 Luke xiv. 11.

8 1 Cor. iv. 7.

12 Rom. xi. 19.

4 Prov. xvi. 18.

9 Mat. xi. 29.

13 Rom. xii. 16.

5 James iv. 6.

‘A contrite and humble heart, O God! thou wilt not despise.’¹

On patience and mildness.

‘He that is patient, is governed with much wisdom; but he that is impatient, exalteth his folly.’²

‘A mild answer breaketh wrath; but a harsh word stirreth up fury.’³

‘In your patience, you shall possess your souls.’⁴

‘Wo to them that have lost patience.’⁵

‘Set a watch, O Lord! before my mouth; and a door round about my lips.’⁶

‘The servant of the Lord must not wrangle; but be gentle towards all men.’⁷

‘And they that sought evils to me, spoke vain things;—and I became as a man that heareth not, and hath no re-proofs in his mouth; for in thee, O Lord! have I hoped.’⁸

‘I was troubled, and I spoke not.’⁹

‘The bruised reed he (Christ) shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench;—He shall not be sad, nor troublesome.’¹⁰ He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth.’¹¹

‘If, doing well, you suffer patiently, this is thanksworthy before God. For unto this you have been called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps,—who, when he was reviled, did not revile: when he suffered, he threatened not; but delivered himself to him that judged him unjustly.’¹²—The high-priest rising up, said to him: Answerest thou nothing to the things which these witness against thee?—but Jesus held his peace.’¹³

1 Ps. l. 19.

2 Prov. xiv. 29.

3 Prov. xv. 1.

4 Luke xxi. 19.

5 Eccl. ii. 16.

6 Ps. cxl. 3.

7 2 Tim. ii. 24.

8 Ps. xxxvii. 13. 15. 16.

9 Ps. lxxvi. 5

10 Isai. xlii. 3. 4.

11 Isai. liii. 7.

12 1 Pet. ii. 20. 22. 23.

13 Mat. xxvi. 62. 63.

‘Do thy works in meekness, and thou shalt be beloved ;¹
keep thy soul in meekness.’²

‘Walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called,
with all humility, and mildness, with patience, supporting
one another in charity.’³

*On the love of God for us, and that which we ought to have
for him*

‘Thus saith the Lord,—I have loved thee with an ever-
lasting love.’⁴

‘Thou sparest all ; because they are thine, O Lord ! who
lovest souls.’⁵

‘Can a woman forget her infant ?—and if she should
forget, yet will I not forget thee.’⁶

‘The Lord’s portion is his people,—he kept him as the
apple of his eye.’⁷

‘God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten
Son.’⁸

‘He (Christ) loved me, and delivered himself for me.’⁹

‘Let us therefore, love God ; because God first hath loved
us.’¹⁰

‘If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be
anathema.’¹¹

‘I will love thee, O Lord ! my strength—my refuge—my
protector.’¹²

‘What have I in heaven ? and besides thee, what do I
desire upon earth ?’¹³

1 Eccl. iii. 9.

6 Isai. xlix. 15.

10 1 John iv. 19.

2 Eccl. x. 31.

7 Deut. xxxii. 9. 10.

11 2 Cor. xvi. 22.

3 Eph. iv. 1. 2.

8 John iii. 16.

12 Ps. xvii. 2. 3.

4 Jerem. xxxi. 3.

9 Gal. ii. 20.

13 Ps. lxxii. 25.

5 Wisd. xi. 27.

CHAPTER IX.

ON HOLY COMMUNION.*

SECTION I.

The desire and love of holy communion.

GOD, every where infinitely amiable, is every where well deserving the warmest tribute of our affections.—If, however, we were to proceed to analyze the various motives, which, from various causes may forcibly inflame the heart, not one amongst them all should we discover, that is more peculiarly calculated to do it, than the divine mystery of the Eucharist, and the prodigies concentrated in it. The Eucharist is truly the great mystery, and master-piece, of love. As if it were not enough for the beneficent Author of our redemption to have laid down his life for our salvation, he, moreover, in this astonishing institution, miraculously bestowing himself upon us,—becomes the very food and nourishment of our souls,—enriches us with blessings, and fills us with graces.

Nothing, it is obvious, ought to appear more natural, than to suppose, that the individuals, who believe the mystery, and who adore its wonderful properties, should also love it,—should with eagerness, desire it; and with ardor, exult in the enjoyment of its benefits. Such interest, solicitude, and satisfaction, are but the plain results of our faith, and our professions.

Yet how few are the happy beings, who, now, animated by faith, love tenderly the delicious food; feed constantly upon its sweetness; and bring always to its participation a

* From Fletcher.

relish adapted to its excellence! This is an evil, over which religion weeps; an evil, which very justly calls for her bitterest tears. What should create grief, if indifference, like this, do not? Surely, it is ungrateful! Yes; and not only is it ungrateful, but it is deeply criminal likewise. St. Ambrose does not hesitate to affirm, that the mere want of relish for communion is a presage, and a prelude, of reprobation. 'Not to communicate,' he says, 'or not to love the holy communion, is a mark of reprobation. For, of the Eucharist it is written, that they, who abstain from it shall perish; and they who love it not shall be rejected.' The truth is, that, without the love of communion, there is no real love of God; nor any real interest for salvation.

Many entertain a lively horror of that impiety, which wilfully profanes our mysteries. They consider a sacrilegious communion the most heinous crime, that the perversity of human malice can commit. Thus, they would not approach to the altar, without having first confessed their sins; heard the sentence of absolution pronounced over them; and performed those exercises, which are marked out in their books of piety. All this is well;—but it is thus far only, that their ideas are correct. Here end the notions, which they entertain, respecting the dispositions, which should fit them to share our mysteries. As if there were nothing displeasing to God in the coldness, which feels no relish for the holy food; nothing criminal in the indolence, which receives it seldom; they, perhaps, never think of placing their coldness, or their indolence, upon the catalogue of their offences. No,—provided they just comply with the rules of decency, by communicating on a few festivals of the year,—or, it may be, only at Easter,—no matter whether they do it with reluctance or not, they imagine they have satisfied the obligations of religion: and their consciences, merely because they lean to the side of their prejudices, are at rest.

But, what is a communion, that is made reluctantly ; in compliance, merely with laws and customs ; or even without real affection,—what is it, but a forced homage ?—what, but the offering of a frozen heart ? what, but the tribute of self-love to human respect, or of human respect to self-love ? Consulting the dictates of reason only, we must be convinced, that a communion performed in such dispositions cannot really be acceptable to the God of love,—to a God, who, with infinite tenderness presents himself, with all his treasures, to his creatures. Love, with all its warmest feelings, is the proper return for such a blessing.

Upon the authority of Him, who is truth itself, we are assured, that the Eucharist associates and unites us, by its participation, immediately to our Redeemer, and to our God. Ought we not, therefore, ardently to love it ? Ought we not affectionately to cherish the hallowed principle ? No doubt, we ought, if it be a duty,—as it is the first of duties,—to cherish the main cause of our sanctification. For, what, besides the honor of such a union, are the benefits affixed to it ? Every benefit is affixed to it, that the solicitude for salvation can ambition. Placing in the soul the source of every excellence, it fills it, of course, with graces and consolations,—giving to the weak, strength ; to the distressed, patience ; to the afflicted, peace ; to the tempted, victory.

There is, moreover, in the very manner, in which Jesus bestows himself upon us, a great deal, that ought to inflame our interest for the sacred mystery ; and that does very tenderly inflame the interest of the truly virtuous. Wonderful in all his dispensations, how surpassing wonderful, is here the ingenuity of his love ! He bestows himself upon us, divested of every mark of greatness ; stripped of every appendage of power ; disrobed of every ray of majesty ;—every attribute and perfection veiled under the humble appearances of bread and wine. Is not desire the first

impulse of the faith, that believes the consoling mystery? Are not love, gratitude, relish, satisfaction, the obvious appendages to its enjoyment? No doubt, they are :—and if experience did not prove, that men can believe it, without these sensations, reason would not conceive, that such perversity could exist.

The conduct and language of our Saviour, when he was on the point of instituting the sacrifice of our altars, and of giving his sacred flesh to his apostles, are peculiarly instructive : ‘With an ardent desire,’ he lovingly exclaimed, ‘I have desired to eat this passover with you, before my death.’ Now, what was the cause of feelings such as these? Whence all this solicitude? Whence this strong expression of desire? Not, surely, in order to share of the legal victim. Not, doubtless, to partake of the figurative passover. These,—always unsubstantial emblems,—could not now in particular, since now they were fulfilled, be any longer the objects of his veneration. It was not for them, certainly, that he designed to testify such interest. But, what then was the motive, which actuated him? Why; he was anxious to bequeath the great legacy of his love for man;—anxious to institute the sacrifice of the new law; and to bestow that food, by which we might ‘live forever.’ He was anxious to point out to us, in his own eagerness of preparing the delicious banquet, what should be the measure of ours for its participation;—anxious to show that love with which he unites himself to his creatures. These were the motives of his conduct, upon this occasion; and these the lessons, which, by his expressions, he intended to impress upon us. He instructs us, that our desire and love of the holy communion ought to be in imitation of his own,—warm, tender, and affectionate. We ought, he inculcates to us,—like him, ‘with ardent desire,’ to desire to eat this passover.

Thus, what do we find in the annals of religion,—was the point of view, in which, anciently, the faithful were

wont to consider, and what the interest, with which they used to cultivate, the participation of our holy mysteries? They considered, and cultivated, their participation as the most important, and the most pleasing, of all their duties,—even as the sweetest consolation of human life. There was no feature in their character, that, during the early ages, was more prominent than their ardor for communion. Their ardor for it was such, that, at periods of persecution, they often braved,—even the most timid braved,—dangers, tortures, and every horrible form of cruelty, in order to enjoy its benefits. And having enjoyed them,—so great, we often read, were the transports of their joy, that they would smile under the hands of the executioner; and exult in the very agonies of death. Then too, for the same reasons, and from similar causes of persecution, although the pastors were reduced to perform the sacred rites, and to distribute the adorable food, in rocks, and caves, and dungeons,—yet, did the rock, the cave, the dungeon, become a paradise to the faithful, because they presented to them the body and blood of their Redeemer.

Even at periods considerably subsequent to these,—after the violence of persecution had been succeeded by the triumphs of the church,—the love and relish for communion continued still to animate the public mind. St. Chrysostom informs us, that, in his time, when piety was comparatively colder,—‘The faithful in general knew no satisfaction so great, as to feast on the bread of life;—no grief so great, as to be deprived of it.’ They still regarded its participation, as the main source of their best satisfactions, and the chief principle of their joys. By it, they heightened every rational pleasure; and alleviated the pressure of every care. It was their support under all their difficulties; their resource in all their wants. They sacrificed every thing to enjoy it,—occupations, business, cares, pleasures, sensualities. They came to it,—to use the language of Chrysostom,

‘clothed with fire; enlivened by zeal; and filled with expectation. And possessed of it,—having quaffed the celestial grace,—the poor thought themselves rich; the miserable, happy.’ In the words of the psalmist,—but, with greater reason than the psalmist,—they were wont to exclaim,—‘How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! Blessed are they, that dwell in thy house: for, better is one day in thy courts, above thousands.’

By way of reply to the urgency, with which I may seem to press the usages of ancient precedent upon them, perhaps some might here wish to remark,—that they do not now crowd the altars, as men did formerly; nor, like them, communicate often, ‘out of respect and veneration for the sacred mysteries.’ Respect and veneration for the sacred mysteries! This is a cold, unfeeling excuse, invented by self-love to apologize for indolence, and ingratitude. A real respect for the sacred mysteries, although it may tremble at their sanctity, is yet always united with an ardent affection for them. A real respect is the fruit of a lively faith: and a lively faith is always the source of appetite and love. Not only does a real respect abstain from sin and dissipation, in order to present itself frequently at the holy table; but, it suspends, for the sake of this happiness, even the necessary occupations, and engagements of society. No;—let it never be said, that any one entertains a real respect and veneration for our banquet, who experiences no hunger for it. Or, if there be individuals, who, leading lives of innocence and piety, do abstain from it, out of respect and veneration, I can only say, that, whilst I praise their virtue, I blame their mistaken notions. Their notions are repugnant to the ends of the life-giving institution;—at variance with the practices of the virtuous in every age; and opposed directly to the opinions of the best writers of the christian church.

Whilst a relish for our mysteries is the proper appendage of the faith, which adores them; and the obvious tribute,

which is due to their excellence,—it is, moreover, the very principle, by which the soul attains most certainly, and most abundantly, all those benefits, which they are destined to impart. The benefits, which the divine banquet yields, depend greatly, if not principally, upon the hunger and relish, which men carry to its participation. It is upon the measure of these, that is regulated, perhaps chiefly, the measure of those graces and favors, which it has been established to supply. ‘Let the heart,’ says Saint Cyprian, ‘be only thirsty, and widely expanded; and this immense ocean of graces, in proportion as the ardor of faith shall have dilated it,—shall fill it; and make it overflow.’

Appetite is the effect of health:—the want of it, is the fruit of illness. By appetite, the stomach converts into nourishment the aliments, which it receives:—by the want of appetite, it changes them into humors. In these similitudes, we have the images of those effects, which the manna of our altars produces in the soul of the communicant. This divine and exquisite food gives health to the soul, that eats it with a lively relish,—that comes to it, enamored with its sweets; and ardently longing for its enjoyment. To such a soul, it gives every thing, that the fondest solicitude can desire;—grace, vigor, fortitude, peace, contentment. But, if eaten without relish,—its effects then, just like those of corporal food taken without appetite, are useless, and of no avail:—usually, they are pernicious; and sometimes fatal;—pernicious, certainly, and fatal, if the want of relish amount to an absolute repugnance. Hence, does Saint Austin say, ‘Whoever presumes to eat at the holy table, let him, above all things, be hungry. Then, he shall truly eat life. Then, he shall inhale strength; and be filled with vigor. For, here it is only the hungry, that are fed.’

But what is the character of those feelings,—the love, desire, and relish,—which ought always to prepare, and accompany, the act of communion? They are those same

feelings of sensibility and interest, which the mind experiences for any object, that is highly deserving of its affection,—with this difference only, that here, in the performance of this consoling duty, they are heightened by faith; and enlivened by every motive, that can give to ardor, energy; and to endearment, tenderness. The enlightened and pious Christian experiences them always. His feelings are always warm, affectionate, and generous. Beholding with the eye of faith, every thing in the Eucharist, that is amiable and perfect, he consequently loves it. To fit himself for it, is his great solicitude; to enjoy it, his chief delight. From the pleasing prospect of receiving it, he goes through all his trials and occupations, with cheerfulness. From its reception,—feeling, that now the blood of Jesus circulates with his own,—he derives pleasures, too exquisite to be expressed. You may even remark, on the glad occasion, the rays of happiness beaming from his countenance.—Come with this disposition; and then, you may depend upon it, you will derive from the blessed institution every benefit, which it has been established to impart, even the completion of that promise of its beneficent Author, that, ‘He, who eats this bread, shall live forever.’

SECTION II.

Frequent communion.

HOLY communion is the great source of health, of strength, and of security to the soul;—but to produce these effects, it ought to be received often;—it ought to be taken, not as a mere occasional repast, but as the ordinary and regular nourishment of the heart. This is a truth, which every thing in the sacred scriptures; every thing in religion, and in ancient precedent, establishes, and confirms.

‘My flesh,’ Christ Jesus asserts, ‘is meat indeed ; and my blood is drink indeed.’—[In St. John, chapter vi. verse 55.] What proof can be more forcible than this, of the necessity of frequent communion ? or what inducement more urgent, to run to it with avidity ? The being, we are here assured, who is life, and health, and strength ;—who is the joy of heaven, and the delight of angels ;—who is the author of every excellence, and of every comfort,—stooping to the littleness of human nature, bestows himself upon us ; becomes to us a spiritual food, and a spiritual drink ; rendering himself the source of our sanctification, and the principle of our eternal life. Surely, when thus the divine wisdom deems it necessary to prepare such a banquet for us,—we too should deem it necessary to receive it ; and when a God presents himself to our embraces, we should rush with eagerness to his arms.

‘He that eateth my flesh,’ our Redeemer adds, ‘and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.’—No doubt, if there be one blessing, that is valuable ;—one blessing, that is dear to the interest for salvation ;—one blessing, that is calculated to inflame love ; to enkindle hope ; to stimulate ardor ; to infuse consolation,—it is manifestly this. To dwell in Christ is manifestly the greatest of all possible advantages, and the first of all possible honors ;—the sure token of divine friendship here ; the sure pledge of the divine mercy hereafter. And since this residence in Christ is established by the medium of holy communion, therefore does it follow, that its participation is, at once, the first of our obligations ; and should be the dearest of our comforts.

To understand more clearly, still, both the motive, which prompted the divine wisdom to institute the Eucharist, and the reason why its participation is so necessary, consider, what it is, that constitutes the essence of christian piety ; and that forms the very end of christianity itself. It is principally, if not solely, this,—to unite us to Christ ; in order

that growing upon him, just like the branch upon its parent stock, we may be filled with his spirit, and animated by his will. This it is, that constitutes the essence of piety; the end of religion, and the aim of all its institutions. Upon the reality of this union depends life;—upon its absence, death. ‘I am the vine,’ says Christ, ‘you, the branches. Whoever abideth not in me, is cast forth, as a withered branch, fit only to be thrown into the fire, and to be burnt.’¹

The Eucharist is the established tie, which unites man to God; and the ordinary source of our justice and sanctification. ‘He that eateth my flesh, dwelleth in me; and I in him. As the Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he, that eateth me, the same shall also live by me.’ Words cannot express more clearly, than these do, the reality of the incorporation, which is produced by the sacred mysteries. Man, it is here declared, becomes, by their participation, as intimately joined to his Saviour, as the Saviour is united to his Father;—so that he can say truly with St. Paul,—‘I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.’² So close is the union, which is formed by the holy communion, that the fathers of the church, in order to express it, are wont frequently to call the communicant—‘one body and one blood in Jesus Christ.’—If we admit the wisdom of these conclusions, we, then, must also admit the importance and necessity of the holy communion. It is the link of union between man and his Redeemer. Therefore, it is co-important, and co-essential with this blessing.

It is accordingly, in consequence of this effect,—and in consequence, too, of all the other wonderful properties of the bread of life,—that its benevolent Author, whenever almost he spoke of it, during his earthly career, or whenever he only alluded to it,—was pleased to employ, either the tenderest invitations, or the severest threats;—invitations, to engage men to receive it often;—threats, if they ungrate-

1 John xv.

2 Gal. ii. 20.

fully refused it. 'Come to me,' he says, 'all you, that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Come, and you shall find rest to your souls. Come, and as I live by the Father, just so shall you live by me : '—thus, along with the most pressing solicitations, holding out the most urgent motives to accept them. But, mark his threats. They are striking, perhaps, more than his invitations ; although indeed they are but the natural consequences of the neglect of the laws of gratitude, and of the rejection of the principles of security.—'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.' In this threat alone—without citing any others,—is included every thing, that ought to awaken the solicitude of the Christian. Christ Jesus, we here observe, who is the author of life and death ; and who attaches the cause of life, and the punishment of death, to whatever principle his wisdom chooses,—attaches positively the loss of life, or the misfortune of an eternal death, to the neglect of communion. 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, you shall not have life in you.' It is here with the soul, as it is with the body in relation to corporal food. As the body dies, if deprived of corporal aliment,—just so, does the soul perish, if you deny it the bread of life.

Thus, even after this hasty consideration of the motives, which enforce the participation of our adorable banquet, it cannot appear reasonable to imagine, that to refuse it, or neglect it,—can really be indifferent things. Not even, can we reconcile its merely unfrequent participation with our duty. Its unfrequent participation is, in fact, inconsistent with our duty ; inconsistent, both with our faith, and with the benefits, which our faith assures us, the mystery confers ; inconsistent, both with the love of God, and with the slenderest interest for the soul. And first, its unfrequent participation cannot be reconciled with any thing, that really

resembles the love of God.—God, we believe, in this wonderful mystery, presents himself to our embraces. And shall we call it love, hardly ever to go near him? At our altars, and in the holy communion, he presents himself to us; he intreats; he urges us earnestly to hasten to him,—assuring us, that, along with himself, he will bestow also his choicest gifts upon us. And do we conceive it love,—do we conceive it any thing like interest for our own good,—to shrink, cold and indifferent, from him? Animated with the warmest friendship for us, God here wishes to unite us indissolubly to himself. And what a strange correspondence is it not, with such tenderness, either to refuse the union, or to accede to it with reluctance? It is indeed in vain, that we flatter ourselves, that we really love God, if we do not love him in our mysteries. And vainly do we expect to be forever united to him hereafter, if we coldly shrink from his society at present. This mere act of ingratitude and inattention, abstracting from every other crime, is alone sufficient to excite the divine displeasure, and to call down vengeance on us.

The unfrequent participation of the holy communion is incompatible, in like manner, even with the slenderest interest for salvation. This, indeed, is manifest from what I have already established;—every thing in the character of the mystery showing it. The Eucharist is the food of the soul,—designed to be the great principle of its health, the source of its vigor; and the support of its weakness, when enfeebled. It is this, and a great deal more than this. Consequently, to refuse it,—or under our different wants and infirmities to neglect it,—what is this, but an act of insensibility and indolence, which betrays a torpid indifference to salvation? It is a criminal violation even of the laws of rational self-love. Why, let it only be here supposed (this is a parallel, but a very inferior case) that God had bestowed upon mankind a species of food, which had the property of

maintaining the constant vigor of the body, or the virtue of restoring its lost health,—supposing this,—what, under such circumstances, would be our conduct? I need not say it. Loving ourselves; valuing life and health, we would, of course, cherish what would be so eminently useful to us. We would have incessant recourse to its comforts; and exult daily in its effects.—Alas! how much more prudent is the man than the Christian! and how much more consistently do we act, when there is question of this perishable vessel of clay, than when there is question of that immortal part, which alone deserves our care? All ardor, for what would be useful to the former, we are all apathy, for what might easily secure the latter;—verifying here that saying of our Saviour, that ‘The children of this world are wiser in their generation, than the children of light.’

The duty of frequent communion is eloquently and urgently enforced, in the writings of the fathers, as the main principle of a virtuous life; and the great security of future happiness. Referring, for example, to the writings of Saint Chrysostom, we find, that this zealous and holy pastor was exceedingly afflicted, and even wept with bitterness, because, in his time, the faithful of his congregation did not communicate, every day;—because, unlike their pious ancestors, ‘they did not consider the day on which they had not communicated, as a day, on which they had hardly lived like Christians.’—It had become, it would seem, a prevailing, though perhaps not a general custom, for the faithful of Constantinople to approach to the holy table, only upon Sunday, and the more solemn festivals of the year.—But then, with few exceptions, they all did this.—However, this was the degeneracy, of which Chrysostom complained so much; and for which he shed so many tears. His wisdom and piety deemed this too seldom. He told his flock, that, because they did not communicate more frequently, ‘they received so little benefit from the sacrifice.’ He told them, that,

because they did not communicate oftener, 'they insulted the beneficence of God, by refusing the noblest of his gifts.' He told them, that, because they did not communicate oftener, 'they did violence to the body and blood of Jesus Christ.' 'The Eucharist,' he adds, 'does not possess any virtue, at Easter, beyond what it does, at other seasons of the year. It is every day the same,—every day the source of grace. And therefore should the christian Easter continue throughout the year.' Neither were these sentiments peculiar to St. Chrysostom. They were the sentiments of all the ancient fathers; who, all of them, considering the Eucharist, as the ordinary source of grace, and the tie of union between God and man, considered consequently its frequent participation, as the first obligation of christian piety.

During the first ages of the church, it was the holy communion, that, according to the testimonies of the early writers, maintained principally the innocence and virtue of the faithful; that gave heroism to the martyr; ardor to the confessor; purity to the virgin; piety to all.—'When the faithful,' says St. Chrysostom, 'quitted the sanctuaries, where they had just been communicating, you might have seen them come forth, animated with more than human fortitude; braving persecution; and, like generous lions, rushing to death in triumph.' At subsequent periods, if the effects of the sacred food were in general less striking, yet were they, often, not less certain, nor less efficacious. We have a countless variety of attestations, which consolingly prove, that, at every era, the divine elements have continued constantly to beget saints; and to cherish hosts of saint-like individuals. Consulting the annals of piety, we find there the account of immense multitudes in every situation and state of life, from the altar to the throne, and from the throne to the cottage, who, subduing their passions, conquering their inclinations, combatting with ardor every surrounding obstacle, attained the most exalted heights of sanctity;—and who did

this, (we have frequently their own assurances of it) by that strength, which they derived from the constant use of the bread of life.

Indeed, not even in our own days, degenerate as they are, are the happy fruits of frequent communion unknown. The divine manna is still a source of distinguished holiness to a certain, and not inconsiderable, portion of our great community. 'I have seen,' says a late holy, and experienced, guide of modern piety, 'I have seen the great effects of frequent communion, a hundred, and a hundred times: and I see them still, every day. And,' he adds, 'if any one will give himself the trouble to examine the lives of those, who communicate often, he will assent to what I have asserted.' Yes, these favored beings, are conspicuous for the purity of their morals, and the excellence of their conduct. Chaste, meek, humble, temperate, benevolent, they are the objects of general esteem, and of general veneration. Such are the fruits of frequent communion! They are, indeed, but natural. For, what blessings must not the Author of all blessings introduce into those hearts, in which he resides habitually? Even the very idea of communicating often, is a curb to passion, and a check to vice; a spur to piety, and an incitement to every virtue.

To recapitulate, and conclude.—The food, which is administered at the sacred banquet, is the proper nourishment of the soul, and the principle of its health; the source of grace, and the band of union with Jesus Christ. To its participation, is annexed the promise of eternal life; to its refusal, the punishment of eternal death. Its participation—the dictate alike of gratitude and love, of wisdom and interest—has formed the chief duty, in every age, and the dearest comfort, of the christian world; whilst, even in the present age, it constitutes still the main basis of christian excellence.

Yes, if we really aspire to virtue, and sincerely wish to save our souls,—let us communicate often. It is by communicating often, that virtue will be obtained most easily; and our salvation, most effectually secured. ‘If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.’ Do we labor under strong temptations, or struggle with arduous difficulties?—let us communicate often. It is by communicating often, that we shall acquire the strength to combat vigorously, and the grace to come off with triumph. ‘He, that eateth my flesh, dwelleth in me, and I in him.’ Do we pine in afflictions, or bend under the pressure of distress?—let us communicate often. It is at our altars,—feasting there on the bread of life, and drinking from the brimful torrent of delight,—that our afflictions will subside to calmness, and our distresses be converted into joys. ‘Come to me all you, that labor, and I will refresh you.’

SECTION III.

The purity required for a worthy communion.

IN holy communion we receive,—and it is the most consoling article of our faith to know it,—we receive into our breasts the flesh and blood of the adorable Jesus. Of course, we cannot help conceiving, that to prepare the heart for such a treasure must require very diligent circumspection. We receive into our breasts, in this sacred action, Christ Jesus himself in person, in order that ‘he may dwell in us, and we in him.’ Therefore, we must feel convinced, that, to render ourselves worthy of such a union, must demand a share of purity corresponding, in some degree at least, to its transcendent sanctity.

Communion is not a mere holiday ceremony; not a business of custom, of decency, or fashion. It is an action the

most exalted and sublime ; the most sanctified and holy ; the most vitally interesting, which man can perform on this side of the grave. It introduces, I have just remarked, Christ Jesus himself, the eternal Lord of heaven, into the heart. And it introduces him there, either to bless it, or to condemn it ; to adorn it with graces, or to fill it with maledictions. Neither, indeed, are these awful alternatives anything more, than the obvious consequences of such an action. For, where man receives the flesh and blood of a God, it cannot reasonably be imagined,—so stupendous is the mystery,—that there can really exist any medium between the greatest good, and the greatest evil ; between the dearest blessing, and the heaviest curse. It is precisely from these calculations, that St. Paul, so emphatically declares, that he, who receives unworthily, is guilty ‘of eating and drinking’ (mark the strong expression) even ‘damnation to himself.’

Whoever, with the eye of faith, has considered the nature of the mystery of our altars, must feel convinced, that merely to adore it, or to join in the sacrifice, in which it is offered up, demands a considerable share of innocence and virtue. In this mystery, there is contained Christ Jesus himself in person, the eternal Word, from whom all things derive their existence,—his glories only veiled, and his greatness concealed from the mortal eye. The manifest consequence is, that to such mystery, there is therefore due, every tribute of profound respect ; and every sentiment of devotion, which piety can offer. As round the throne of heaven only innocence is permitted to attend,—so innocence alone, as far as innocence is attainable here,—should presume to assist at the altar, where the divine victim is offered up :—or at least, just as before the throne of heaven the angel, because he is not pure enough, trembles ; and the cherub, for the same reason, veils his face,—just so, or rather much more so, should the Christian tremble, and be

confounded, when he comes to worship before our christian sanctuaries.

If such be the sanctity of the Eucharist, that man is not worthy even to adore it;—what ought to be the character of his dispositions, when he is preparing to receive it in communion! When there is question of placing infinite perfection and infinite greatness within the humble tabernacle of the human heart! Why, the sanctity of the Eucharist being infinite, and the distance between what is infinite and what is human, being infinite likewise,—so should no human creature (timidity might infer) presume to receive it. Such inference may, perhaps, have presented itself to our imaginations. But is it thus, that the Eucharist ought solely to be considered! No;—happily not.—Besides contemplating the intrinsic sanctity of our banquet, it is necessary, moreover, to reflect upon its end, and destination. And what are these?—Why; it has been established, and is designed, precisely for the use of man. Man consequently, may receive it. Of course,—consoling thought!—be the sanctity of the Eucharist what it may, although even it be infinite,—yet, is there still a measure of human purity, which suffices for its worthy participation. By a privilege of the divine mercy, (it is only by virtue of such privilege) the purity, which is required to communicate worthily, is within the reach of human industry. Inferior far to the purity of the celestial spirits,—although these, I have said, tremble, whilst they merely adore,—it is a purity reconcileable with defects; compatible with the impulse of dangerous inclinations; consistent with the assaults of violent temptations. These are the appendages of our nature, which subsist very frequently in the best and wisest; and with which, therefore, out of pity to our condition, God permits us to approach his sanctuary.

But what are then the means, which religion prescribes, as the sources of that purity, which ought to adorn the

communicant? They are, the labors of penance, which begin the expiation of sin. They are, the mortification of the passions, which prepares the destruction of the carnal man. They are, the flight of every danger, which enfeebles the violences of concupiscence. They are the privation even of innocent pleasures, which compensates for the indulgence of criminal ones. They are the cultivation of prayer, meditation, and piety, which calls down the aids of grace, and the influences of the divine complacency.—These, and employments such as these, are the happy mediums, which prepare, and ultimately confer, the purity, which alone is worthy to present itself at the sacred banquet.

It is a common notion,—but oh! how fatal!—to believe, that the attainment of the purity, which is requisite for the worthy participation of the sacred mysteries, consists in very little else than the performance of a passing ceremony. That it consists, (heaven grant, that the reproach may not apply to us!) in very little else, than the mere action of confession;—and of a confession, which, frequently, no penance has preceded; no compunction, accompanied,—a confession, ill prepared, and ill made. But,—can we imagine that a few tears, which produce no amendment; a few resolutions, which effect no change; a few promises, which are never kept,—will endear us to our God? or render us welcome to his embraces? We cannot, if we reflect,—believe it. We cannot, if we reflect, help feeling, that here the dispositions should be really purified; and that, receiving Jesus into our hearts, we should have ‘put on Jesus,’—loving his law; and walking, like him after his resurrection, ‘in newness of life.’ It is certainly only into a soul, thus disposed, that Jesus can enter, with satisfaction. It is only to a mansion thus adorned, that he will say, as he did once to that of Zaccheus,—‘This day, is salvation brought into this house.’

SECTION IV.

The piety required for a worthy communion.

AFTER having washed away the defilements of sin, and fortified the heart against the assaults of the passions, the next object, which the enlightened communicant attends to, is to decorate the soul with the ornaments of grace, and the beauties of holiness. For, although, indeed, the emancipation from the disorders of sin be here the main essential, yet it is not all that piety demands. It is the means, rather of preventing profanation, than of communicating profitably. To communicate profitably, men ought, manifestly, to be,—not merely not traitors, like Judas; but affectionate disciples, like the apostles;—not simply not the followers of vice; but the cultivators of virtue. Therefore, besides being free from the stains of vice,—of impurity, of intemperance, of pride, of injustice, &c.—the prudent communicant is careful, moreover, to adorn his soul with the contrary virtues,—with chastity, self-denial, humility, and charity,—in short, with all those lovely qualities, which can recommend him to the divine complacency.

It is a circumstance, too, which, in relation to our mysteries, ought always to be present to our minds, and dear to our hearts,—and which also evinces forcibly the necessity of those qualities, for which I am now contending,—that, by the action of our communion we intimately unite ourselves to Jesus; so that, as the apostle says, ‘He dwells in us; and we in him.’ Now, can any inference, in such case, be plainer, than that therefore we ought to bear some kind of resemblance to him? Can we imagine, that to unite Jesus to a soul, which possesses no features of likeness to him, can really be pleasing to the celestial guest; or useful to the individual, who dares the bold alliance? Is not likeness the very essence of all unions?—of friendship?—of

confidence?—of love? It is. And should consequently exist in the participation of the mysterious banquet. Here, since the communicant associates himself with his Redeemer, and even becomes one with him,—so ought he, incontestably, to have put on, as well as he can do it,—some traits and lineaments of his holy character—his inclinations, his sentiments, and desires. These principles, again, are the plain suggestion of christian wisdom. They are those, which, in every age, the saints have taught; and the enlightened followed. To be united to Jesus, men should, certainly, possess some share of his holy spirit.

Still, however, this disposition may be regarded, as the remoter preparation only for the action of communion:—because it ought always to have existed, for some length of time, before its performance.—There is a series of other duties, which constitute, moreover, the immediate preparation for the holy table; and which also demand from the communicant the most serious cultivation. The necessity of this preparation, is founded on the nature of things; and on the respect, which is due to the body and blood of Jesus. But, it is, too,—and this a very important consideration even to our self-love,—it is upon the measure of the care and piety, which immediately prepare and accompany our communion, that a very large share of its benefits depends. The Eucharist is an immense,—a boundless, bottomless, ocean of graces;—yet, it yields these graces, in proportion to the piety, which we carry to its participation. Where the piety is trifling,—trifling also are the fruits, which it imparts. But, where the piety is such as it should be,—sincere and ardent;—where the vessel of the heart, well purified from sin, and adorned with virtues is opened wide to receive the hallowed stream,—the stream enters in copious volumes, and fills the whole capaciousness of the soul. There is no form of blessing, that the warmest zeal for salvation can desire, which is not the reward of a com-

munion prepared by fervent piety. And see now the manner in which it acts.

When the glad occasion is near at hand, that calls the virtuous Christian to the embraces of his Redeemer,—although his whole conduct has been a certain preparation for the happy union,—yet, does he now redouble his care and attention to it. He forms a solitude within his own breast, in which he delightfully meditates the consolations, which await him. Even amidst his ordinary occupations, and the drudgery of labor, the dear remembrance is constantly present to his mind. It lives fast rivetted there,—following him every where, and in every action; perhaps, even sweetly interrupting the calm composure of his slumbers. Far from him now, all diversions and amusements;—all, that can disturb, or agitate, his feelings. Just as when Moses, preparing to converse with God, commanded, that neither men, nor animals, should approach the holy mountain,—just so, he takes care, that no noise of creatures shall distract his heart. ‘The Lord,’ he says with David, ‘resides in the mansion of peace.’¹ And ‘it is good,’ he adds, ‘to wait with silence for the salvation of God.’²

To this spirit of recollection, he unites the practice of frequent prayer. His spiritual exercises are now almost uninterrupted. They form his great, and dearest, occupation.—He conceives strong feelings of faith. Penetrating the mysterious veil, which conceals his Saviour from him, and with profound respect adoring him, he, like Thomas, exclaims often,—‘Thou art my Lord, and my God.’—He entertains lively sentiments of hope. Animated with a full conviction of the greatness and goodness of him, whom he is going to receive, he humbly flatters himself, that ‘a virtue will come forth from him,’ to cure the maladies, and to heal all the wounds, of his heart;—and he says to himself,—‘If I can but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made

1 Ps. lxxv. 3.

2 Lament. iii. 26.

whole.'—He enkindles in his breast the tenderest sensations of love. The chief end of his communion, he remembers, is to unite himself to Jesus in the bands of love. Hence, the effusions of his love are incessant. 'My soul,' he is constantly saying, 'sighs for thee, my God, just as the thirsty stag pants for the water's stream. My soul thirsts after thee, the strong, and the living God.'—He makes sometimes acts of profound humility. Comparing his own littleness with the majesty of him, whom he is preparing to receive, he is confounded at the contrast; and in words like those of St. Austin, eloquently calls out, 'Alas! O God, this house of my heart is too narrow for thee! Do thou, I entreat, enlarge it. It is falling to ruin. Do thou, I pray, repair it. Its sins are odious to thy purity; and none, save thee, can cleanse it. It is to thee alone, that I run for help. Do thou, O God! purify me.'—He experiences in like manner, and in like manner expresses, the feelings of various other virtues; of joy, gratitude, desire, compunction, &c.—endeavoring by these means, to render himself a welcome guest at the nuptials of the Lamb.

But what are the feelings, which, in the action itself of communion, inspire, and delightfully agitate his heart! To be well understood, they ought to have been experienced. Oh! what sensations, at this awful, but pleasing, moment, are lighted up in his heart! Every earthly affection extinguished,—every anxious care suppressed,—the world and creatures forgotten,—he is alive merely to his God, and to the act before him. Absorbed in these, he approaches to the throne of grace,—his soul burning with love; glowing with devotion; and exulting in the joys of hope. I can compare the sensations of this thrice happy instant to those soft and tender emotions only, which the Blessed Virgin must have felt, when she pressed her dear Son, the lovely infant, to her bosom;—to those transports, which Simeon experienced, when, taking the divine child into his arms, he exclaimed,

‘Now doest thou dismiss thy servant, O Lord! in peace;’ to those rapturous movements, which palpitated at the heart of John, whilst he was permitted to repose on the breast of his Redeemer. Possessed of his God; and feeling the blood of Jesus circulating through his veins, his joy is measured up to the full. He experiences a foretaste of those pure and ineffable delights, which are reserved for him in a future state.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS.*

SECTION I.

Excellence of the sacrifice of the Mass.

A SACRIFICE, in its general acceptation, is an offering made to God, in order to acknowledge his supreme dominion, and man's dependance on him. It is tribute, which gratitude pays to goodness; littleness, to majesty; piety, to holiness. A sacrifice, thus understood, is evidently the dictate of reason, and the suggestion of the best feelings of the heart. Accordingly, in every age, the most unenlightened, equally with the most cultivated;—the use of sacrifices was general. They were every where, and at every epoch, considered the most essential; the most awful, and yet the most consoling, actions of religion;—the important expression, by which men best attested their veneration for the Divinity; conciliated most effectually his favor; and most easily appeased his indignation.

Amongst the first descendants of Adam, before reason was lost in idolatry; and virtue sunk into disorder, it was the custom to erect altars to the divine honor; and to deposit upon them,—in order usually to be consumed,—those gifts and offerings, which appeared most interesting to piety, and most valuable to gratitude. The act of presenting these oblations, was what constituted the most awful duty, that these mortals knew. The scene was impressive. Around the altar, in solemn silence, stood,—or perhaps, in profound

* From Fletcher.

adoration, lay prostrate,—the pious multitude; sanctioning by their acquiescence the holy intentions of the offerer; hallowing the oblation by their devotion, and uniting to it, moreover, the still better oblation of their own hearts.

When the piety of the first inhabitants of the earth had degenerated,—as it did alas! too soon,—and when the ray of reason was buried under the clouds of ignorance and passion,—still, though men suppressed every other act of religion, and adopted the most preposterous notions of the Deity, yet did they continue to retain the use of sacrifices, and the homage of frequent oblations. They considered them,—the most enlightened countries, Greece and Rome, considered them,—thē most interesting far of all their public, or private, transactions; attaching to them the prosperity of states, and the welfare of society; the success of war, and the blessings of peace; the satisfactions of social life, and the comforts of domestic happiness. They were the tributes of respect, however ill-founded, and of reverence, however ill-conceived,—for the being, in whose honor they were professed to be presented;—exhibiting, not a motion, which might, they supposed, displease him; not a look, which might distract the deluded worshippers.

When the state of the world was sunk in idolatry, and corruption,—God, who would not remain without worshippers, selected from amid the great herd of mankind a small portion of individuals,—the Jewish nation,—whom he adopted, as his favorite people. He commanded them to erect a temple, in which his greatness might be adored; and his aid invoked. He chose to be worshipped there with sacrifices; and honored by the tribute of oblations. Figures of our christian blessings, it was by them, that God decreed, his omnipotence should be adored; his perfections revered; and man's dependance owned. Through them, he decided, that his mercy should be conciliated; his anger appeased; and his favors purchased.—They were ushered

in, with the most awful solemnity; and performed, amid expressions of ardent piety and devotion. Every thing, that reverence for the Divinity could insinuate,—every thing, that the sense of human littleness could suggest,—every thing, that the desire of conciliating the divine good will could inspire,—was employed, on the holy occasion. The people assisted at the action of the sacrifice with a respect, that bordered even upon fear. Witnessing the majesty of the high-priest, and the silence of the surrounding levites; seeing the blood of the victim flow, and the clouds of incense rise; hearing the prayers and imprecations, that were pronounced,—they felt a holy trepidation steal upon every sense, and awe the soul to stillness. There was nothing here,—I need not say it,—that resembled disrespect. Disrespect, in the time of sacrifice, even when the Jew had lost his fervor, was a crime, that would have astonished impiety itself. Disrespect, there was none. Even passion itself was respectful: whilst piety was all on fire,—its prayers, like the incense, ascending sweetly to the throne of God.

But, transient shadows of ‘the good things to come,’ the Jewish sacrifices were at last abolished, and a new oblation was substituted in their room, which is to be offered to the end of time. How expressly, and how beautifully does the prophet Malachi announce the sanctity, and the glory, of the new oblation! ‘My will, says the Lord, is no longer with you: neither will I, any more, receive offering from your hands. For, from the rising of the sun, till its going down, my name is great among the Gentiles: and in every place, there is sacrifice; and there is offered to my name a clean offering.’¹ In these words, how clearly is our divine oblation pointed out! In the new order of things, the prophet remarks, ‘a sacrifice’ shall exist. And no sacrifice has existed, save the sacrifice of the Mass. It shall be

offered, he says, 'in every place.' And it is only the sacrifice of the Mass, that is thus, so generally presented. It shall be, he adds, a glorious and a clean oblation. And, what so glorious and so clean, as the mystery of our christian tabernacles?

And here, let us call to mind the occasion itself, when abolishing the ancient rites, our great Pontiff was pleased to substitute the new oblation in their stead.—It was after the last supper; when, taking leave of his apostles, and the world, (this was a moment suited to something great) he thought proper to establish this stupendous monument of his love. 'Taking bread,' say the sacred writers, 'into his hands, he blessed it; and brake it; and gave it to his disciples, and said: Take ye, and eat. This is my body, which is broken for you. Then in like manner, taking the chalice, he gave thanks; and presented it to them, saying: Drink ye all of this. For, this is my blood, which is shed for you.—Do this for a commemoration of me;'—that is, 'Do, what you see me do, in order, that it may be a remembrancer of my death; and of the redemption, which my death procures you.' He had already, before he employed these words, conferred extensive privileges upon his apostles. He had sent them, as his eternal Father had sent him. He had given them power to preach; to baptize; to remit sins; to call down the Holy Ghost. But, by these words, he completed the new order of his priesthood. By them, he gave to his apostles, and to their successors till the end of time, the power to perform, what he had just performed himself,—the power to offer up the sacrifice of the new law;—consecrating the elements of bread and wine; and by the influences of his omnipotent word, converting them into his divine body and blood.

The Eucharist is the most wonderful monument, that exists, of the immensity of God's love for man; and the most astonishing attestation of his power. It is a miracle

more singular in the order of religion, than is in the order of nature, the miracle of the world's creation. Attempting to give his flock some feeble idea of its greatness, Saint Chrysostom thus addresses them in one of his discourses. 'Assisting at our sacrifice,' says the orator, 'you behold standing at the altar the christian levite, the representative there of your Redeemer. He pours out prayers for your salvation, invoking with pious solicitude the flames of celestial love; and begging, that the gift, which he presents, may be pleasing at the throne of grace. Then, invested with power from above, and acting immediately in the person of Jesus, he breathes the mystic words of consecration. He commands:—and forthwith the elements of bread are changed into the body of our Redeemer. 'This is my body.' Again, he commands:—and the elements of wine are changed into his blood:—the chalice is purpled with its stream. 'This is my blood.' Such is the Mass,—a sacrifice, at once, the most divine and holy; the most sublime and admirable,—a wonder, I repeat it, the most astonishing, in the order of wonders. In comparison with it, there was nothing in the ancient sacrifices; nothing in the Jewish oblations, but what sinks into absolute insignificance.

A sacrifice, which is the oblation of the body and blood of our great Redeemer, is calculated evidently to conciliate the tenderest love, or to appease the reddest anger, of the eternal Father;—to awaken in man every possible form of virtue, and to furnish a supply to all our multifarious wants. Such oblation combines every motive, and unites eminently every advantage, that ever suggested to mankind the use of offerings. It is plainly the most perfect sacrifice of adoration, and thanksgiving; of mercy, and impetration, that human reason can imagine,—or indeed, that the divine wisdom could have ordained. 'By it, moreover,' says the council of Trent, 'is represented that bloody sacrifice, which was accomplished once upon the cross. It preserves the memory of this, to the end of the world. And so far is it

from derogating from the value of this oblation, that, on the contrary, it is the medium, by which we participate the more abundantly of its fruits.'—Thus, the sacrifice of the Mass does not detach us from the sacrifice of the cross. It even, on the contrary, attaches us the more affectionately to it. We consider the former, as referred entirely to the latter; as subsisting by it, and deriving all its efficacy from it. We do not conceive, that the Mass is a new price offered up for our salvation, just as if something were wanting to the perfection of the bloody sacrifice. We conceive nothing of the kind. We look upon the bloody sacrifice, as complete. But, we revere the Mass, as the medium, that applies its fruits; as the memorial, that tenderly recalls its benefits. Oh! how truly dear to the virtuous Christian is this action! Placed at the foot of the altar, and seeing that victim which once died for his salvation, that Being who made the universe, lie annihilated, as it were before him,—the virtuous Christian, at this spectacle, is transported, and lost in wonder. All the sensibilities of his heart are excited. The heavens and the earth appear to him united. He seems raised above this earthly sphere; lifted up to those bright abodes, where, round the eternal throne, the seraphim sing to their golden harps the immortal songs of Sion. If, during these awful moments, his eye do not visibly behold his God,—his heart, at least, sensibly feels him.

SECTION II.

Assiduous attendance at the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

IN the preceding chapter, 'on holy communion,' I have remarked, that, considering the nature of the Eucharist, and our acknowledgment of its advantages,—it was but reasonable to imagine, that we would eagerly embrace, and affec-

tionately love, it. Such interest is certainly the immediate suggestion of our belief. Well; and I might here again make the same kind of remark precisely, in relation to our attendance at that sacred rite, in which the great mystery is offered up. Considering the qualities of our sacrifice, and the benefits, which it confers,—it is but natural, in like manner, to suppose, that to assist at its oblation, should appear to us a very important occupation;—an occupation, that is even delightful to our hearts,—heightening all our satisfactions, when we are happy; and soothing all our pains, when we are distressed. Indeed, so very important does this occupation appear, when we contemplate the excellencies of the christian sacrifice, that the wonder is, how any man, believing in the stupendous mystery, can possibly neglect it; or, without extreme reluctance, absent himself from the sanctuary, where the divine victim is offered.

Although I may perhaps have said enough on the Eucharist, in the foregoing pages, to make this manifest, yet will I still add a brief exposition of the motives,—derived from the end and character of the Mass,—which the council of Trent proposes to the faithful, as inducements to assist with readiness at its celebration. ‘The Mass,’ says the council, in its twenty-second session, ‘is that only, and same victim, the same Jesus Christ, that once offered himself upon the cross; and who now offers himself upon the altar by the ministry of the priest; without there being any difference between one oblation and the other, except in the manner of offering.—It is instituted to represent the bloody sacrifice once accomplished on the cross.—It applies to us its salutary virtue for the remission of our sins.’ In these words, there are contained three distinct propositions,—which I shall consider separately.

‘The Mass,’ says the council, ‘is that only, and same victim, the same Jesus Christ, that once offered himself upon the cross,’ &c.—The sacrifice presented upon our altars, is

thus the same precisely with that, which was offered once, on Calvary. There are not two victims ; nor two substances. At each place, and on each occasion, the victim, or the substance, is one,—our divine Redeemer Jesus Christ. The only difference,—for there is a difference,—between the two oblations, consists in the manner, in which they are offered up. On Calvary, Jesus was offered up, by dying actually. On the altar he is offered up, by dying mystically. On Calvary, he offered up his death then present. On the altar he offers up his death now past. He offered himself on Calvary, as a sacrifice of redemption,—earning for us, by his victory there, those graces, which are the principles of our salvation. He offers himself on the altar, as a sacrifice of application,—conferring upon us there, those benefits, which his death had merited. So that the sacrifice upon Calvary, and that, which is presented at our altars, are, in reality, and in essence,—one,—the latter being only the continuation of the former ; and in our regard, its completion. Now, considering the Mass in this awful point of view,—and it is thus, that we should always consider it,—who does not sensibly feel the obligation of assisting at it? Certain it is, that no action can thus be conceived more sacred ;—none, more pleasing to God ;—none, more useful to man.

‘And the Mass,’ continues the council, ‘is instituted, moreover, to represent the bloody sacrifice, once accomplished upon the cross.’—To bear constantly in our remembrance that wonderful mystery, to which we owe our redemption, is a leading principle of christian virtue. It is the dictate alike of gratitude, of wisdom, and of piety:—of gratitude, because it points out in the strongest manner the transcendent goodness of him, who died to save us ;—of wisdom, because showing the infinite evil of sin, it shows also, at the same time, the obligation of avoiding it ;—of piety, because placing before your eyes the life of our sacred

model, it invites us feelingly to imitate it. 'Do this,' said the benevolent Being, when he established the divine institution, 'do this for a commemoration of me.' One of the great aims of his wisdom was to keep alive this useful recollection. And behold, therefore, what is done, each time, that the sacred rites are offered up before us. A solemn commemoration is made of our Redeemer. His life; and the various stages, through which he passed in order to secure your salvation;—his death; and all the bloody scenes, which marked it, are again retraced, and exhibited to your imaginations. 'Each time,' says Saint Paul, 'that you shall eat this bread, and drink this chalice, you shall announce his death, till he come.'

Again, in this second motive, what powerful inducements are presented to us, to assist at our sacrifice! There are thus placed before us, upon our altars, the most endearing images, and the most tender and amiable recollections,—the commemoration of whatever is really valuable to an immortal being. Surely, then, if either love have any power upon our hearts, or faith any influence upon our understandings,—it is in the act of reviewing all these consoling objects, that we ought to experience, I do not say interest only,—but, delight and satisfaction. Compared with these, all human benefits,—which, still, we commemorate with rapture,—are trifling and insignificant.

But, as if the two motives just mentioned were not sufficient to awaken the interest of the faithful, the solicitude of the council has been pleased to suggest a third. This is derived (for the charity of the church employs every expedient to invite us to sanctity) from the principle of self-interest,—that most effectual implement, generally speaking, of human actions and desires. 'The Mass,' the council adds, 'applies to us its salutary virtue for the remission of our sins; calling down mercy upon us, and conferring help in our various necessities.' Perhaps, indeed, are these

the main ends, for which the sacred institution has been established. For, although by his death upon the cross, our Redeemer procured the ransom of his creatures, still did it require some medium to apply this ransom to their souls. It is at the altar, therefore, that, exercising still the functions of High-priest, and Mediator, Jesus continually presents himself a victim to his eternal Father,—displaying those wounds, which he once received; and renewing those groans, which he once uttered, for our salvation. He there, as formerly he did upon the cross, ‘prays with loud cry and tears,’ that the holy oblation, proving acceptable, may appease the divine anger, and effect our reconciliation;—that the streams, which have issued from his mangled body, may fall upon our souls, and purify them; may preserve them from all iniquity, and shelter them from every evil; may adorn them with graces, and consecrate them to sanctity. Such, according to the council, is the third motive for the institution of the Mass; and such are the benefits, which it is intended to secure.

In this pleasing mode of contemplating our sacrifice, we trace, once more, the boundless advantages of assisting at it. For what are our altars, when they are considered in this point of view? They are the asylums of our security,—marked with the blood of Jesus, as once the door-posts of the Israelites were marked with the blood of the Paschal Lamb. They are the sanctuaries of mercy. Here,—every attribute of severity laid aside,—Jesus is truly ‘the Prince of peace.’ He here, seated upon the altar, as upon his throne, gives audience, and receives requests:—and to obtain any request, little more is required, than to present it. At the foot of our altars, the just receive the best blessings, which they enjoy; and taste the sweetest of their consolations. Here, the penitent,—terrified at their sins,—hear confidence whispered to their hearts;—here, the afflicted, bent down under their griefs, pleasingly find relief;—

here, the tempted, trembling at their difficulties, are gifted with fortitude and vigor. At least, I am sure of this,—that, if ever, bringing our wants and miseries into the sanctuary, we laid them down at the foot of the altar, with proper dispositions, we always found some relief; and we carried home a much lighter weight of sorrows, than we had brought with us into those seats of comfort.

It was in consequence of the acknowledgment and certainty of these truths, that, during those happy ages, when piety and faith were lively, the faithful were all singularly exact in their attendance at the divine oblation. Next to the act of communion, they considered this the most binding of all their duties. It was a duty which they never omitted, unless circumstances rendered its fulfilment quite impossible: and then they deemed such impossibility a great calamity. Not business, nor cares, nor worldly interests stayed them; nor inconveniences, nor trifling indispositions; much less,—as is often the case at present,—amusements, and recreations. Such even, in those ages, was the general ardor for this act of religion, that, in order to perform it, the Christian used, not only to forego many earthly advantages, and to sacrifice a multitude of worldly satisfactions, but to brave (he very frequently braved) persecution, and death itself. When the glad hour arrived, which called the faithful to the holy place, we find, that all,—the sick, and their attendants alone excepted,—hastened with raptures to it,—the busy, equally with the unoccupied; the poor, equally with the rich; the old, as well as the young; the indolent even, (if there were such) just like the fervent:—for not even was indolence itself so tepid yet, as without remorse to neglect the attendance at the sacred oblation.

Since, then, the motives, which invite us to assist at our mysteries, are so extremely urgent, let us be careful to fulfil the great duty piously,—with punctual exactitude; and with tender interest. Let us go to our sanctuaries, not only when

the church commands, but as often as our time and circumstances will permit. If the attractions of love do not suffice to draw us, let at least the sense of our misfortunes do it:—for, it is there, beyond every other place, that misfortune finds relief. As, then, amidst winds and rains, amidst storms and thunders, the dove takes refuge in its wonted grove, and in that grove finds shelter,—just so, amidst the dangers and difficulties; amidst the tempests and afflictions of the world, let us take refuge under the blessed shade of our altars. There, we are sure of shelter. There,—because the wings of infinite mercy are spread over us,—there we are sure of protection. There, we are even sure of every kind of consolation,—because there we are placed at the very fountain-head of happiness.

SECTION III.

The dispositions for hearing Mass.

THE Mass is a sacrifice; and a sacrifice too,—since it is the oblation of the body and blood of Christ,—the most divine and holy. Going to our temples, on the occasions, when it is offered, we go, of course, to be the witnesses of this sacred action. We go, indeed, not only to be the witnesses of it, but to be the sharers in it, likewise. We even go, conjointly with the priest, to offer it up to the Almighty. Now, this being the fact,—what appears to be the chief disposition, which the very instinct of reason suggests, as most appropriate to such a duty? Is it not purity from sin, or a sincere sorrow at least, for having committed it? No doubt, it is. Boldly to bring our passions, and our sins unrepented of, to the very footstool of the sanctuary, and into the action itself of sacrifice, what is this, but an insult to the sacred spot; and a profanation of the mystery?

But, at all events, it is not with these dispositions, that we can reasonably expect to derive any advantage from our acts of homage.

So deeply were the minds of some among the saints impressed with the sense of the sanctity of our christian sacrifice, that in their writings they frequently compare the temples, in which it is offered up, to heaven: and pursuing the idea, they point out from it, what the purity ought to be, that men should bring with them into these awful places. In heaven, they say, when the just present themselves before God, they are exhibited, 'clothed in white robes; and without spot before his throne.' And such, they add,—since God is equally present in our temples,—should be the manner, as far as human weakness can attain it, in which the Christian worshipper should always appear before him.—Such is the language of the saints: and it is but consistent. Our temples are really the images of heaven; and our virtue, in them, ought therefore to resemble, in some remote degree, the purity of the celestial spirits. Our temples are those 'new heavens,' which were foretold by the prophet; and promised by God to men. The difference between them, and the eternal temple above, although certainly great, is still only a difference in the accidental modes of the divine appearance. In the temple above, God is seen 'face to face.' In our temples here, he is seen 'darkly.' He is seen in heaven, effulgent in glory. He is seen in our sanctuaries,—his glories obscured and veiled. But, in both, he is equally present; in both, equally pure, and perfect. And, therefore, the consequence is, that just as the saints are without spot before him,—just so, should we, as much as we can do, enter into our temples, undefiled; or, if not undefiled, confounded at our corruption. Virtue, or the piety, that weeps over the loss of virtue, is the disposition, which alone can fit us to assist with worthiness at our tremendous mysteries.

But, as I have already remarked, when we attend at Mass,

we attend there, not as mere spectators, or witnesses, of the sacred action; but, we are, on that solemn occasion, associated with the priest, who officiates at the altar;—with him, we present to the eternal Father the blood of his eternal Son. It is hence, that St. Paul, describing the christian faithful, calls them, ‘a holy nation, and a royal priesthood.’ Placed at the altar, the minister of God stands there, he prays, and speaks, and acts,—in the capacity of our representative. He does not say, ‘I pray; I vow; I protest; I offer.’ He says,—speaking in our name,—‘*We pray; we vow; we protest; we offer:*’ and the sacrifice he calls, not ‘*my sacrifice,*’ but ‘*our sacrifice.*’ Again, therefore, I ask: what is the consequence? Is it with unchaste affections, that we should presume to perform so sacred a duty? Is it with hearts enslaved by criminal passions, that we should come to unite in the oblation of the spotless victim? Can God look down with complacency upon such an offering? Or rather will he not punish it, as an insult? We know, that for the priest to present it in such dispositions, would be sinful in the extreme. And why, then, since we are associated with him, is it not sinful, too, in us? We know, that even the Jew, before he presumed to offer up his imperfect sacrifice, was wont to purify himself from sin; and obliged by many precautions to fit himself for that act of worship. And if so,—shall not a still nicer degree of care appear essential in the Christian,—presenting, as he does, an oblation so much more sacred?

It was under the guidance of these maxims, that, in the early ages of christianity, the pastors of the church did not permit public sinners to be present at the celebration of the holy sacrifice of our altars. If they presented themselves, which they did, to hear the instructions,—the instructions finished, and the preparation for the sacrifice begun,—they were solemnly commanded to retire. ‘Far hence,’ the deacons proclaimed, ‘the impure; the unclean; the lover of

vanity, and falsehood.' And, lo! convinced of the propriety of the command, these unhappy men withdrew. They shrunk back with respect, and awe. Yes, and not only was this the case with the public sinners, but (this is more striking yet) it was the case even with the penitent,—with men, who, having once had the misfortune to sin, had now ardently returned to virtue. The deacons bade these too depart. And these too, although they had perhaps long bewailed their sins,—yet, did they too, with deep humility retire. They retired,—and prostrating themselves beyond the threshold of the sacred mansion, they there poured out their sorrows; and reproached their former folly.

However, these rules of ancient discipline, with regard to scandalous sinners, are not now observed:—I shall not insist upon them. But, be our discipline, at present, what it may,—yet, is it still true, that purity, or the desire of purity, is the essential requisite to assist, with propriety, at the celebration of our sacred mysteries. To pass the holy threshold of our christian sanctuaries, without one, or other, of these dispositions is an act of dangerous boldness.

Thus, obdurate sinners,—men, without repentance, or even the design of repentance, profane, and resolved to remain so,—bringing their passions into the seat of purity,—defile the hallowed place. Coming with all their corruption about them to the very foot of the altar, they insult the victim, that is offered on it;—and, as their hearts disavow the prayers, which their lips pronounce, or which the minister of God pronounces in their name, so do they change the act of worship, into an act of mockery. But in the class of sinners, there are individuals, who are sorry for their sins, and desire to abandon them:—to these the gates of our temples are thrown wide open; and the church affectionately presses them to enter.

Besides purity, or the desire of purity, devotion likewise is another disposition, which ought always to attend us at

the altar. Every thing establishes its necessity,—the holiness of the sacrifice; the part, we bear in its celebration; and all those various motives, which prompt us to worship the Divinity. But, it is the sacrifice itself, that demands it, principally. This,—as I have said repeatedly,—is an action, which, to the eye of faith, exhibits every thing, that can excite the soul to fervor; or inflame the heart to love; every thing, that can chain down the attention of reason; or stay the wanderings of the fancy; every thing, that can inspire sentiments, solemn and religious. The immolation of the victim, that redeemed us; and the descent of a God upon our altars, are motives, surely, that are calculated to do all this.

I have already quoted the sentiments, which the saints entertained, respecting the purity, that is required for the worthy celebration of our mysteries. I shall now mention likewise their opinion concerning the devotion, that should be blended with it. Animated always, and in general eloquent, when the interests of salvation are concerned,—the saints are never more animated, or more eloquent, than when, expressing their own veneration for the Eucharistic sacrifice, they attempt to excite others to revere it with them. The thoughts, on these occasions, burn; the words glow; and the holy men are all on fire. In order to convey an idea of the feelings, with which the faithful ought to assist at Mass, these enlightened instructors have often recourse to some of those scenes represented in the scriptures, which are particularly adapted to impress the mind with awe. Thus, they appeal sometimes to that scene exhibited in the book of revelations, in which is depicted the behaviour of the blessed before the throne of the eternal King:—to the terrific spectacle, sometimes, when God delivered the law to Moses,—the mountain shaking, meanwhile, with the roar of thunder, and the prostrate Israelite trembling:—to the solemnities, not unfrequently, of some of the ancient

sacrifices,—that of Elias, above all, when fire consumed the victim.—From these highly instructive, but comparatively unimportant, instances, they deduce the conclusion, what the conduct ought to be, and what the devotion, of the Christian, when he is present at the celebration of our sacred mysteries. ‘Imagine only to yourselves,’ says St. Chrysostom to his hearers, ‘that Elias stands before you;—that round the venerable priest is ranged an assembled nation,—the victim, meanwhile, lying upon the altar; silence reigning throughout the crowd; and the prophet alone pouring out his supplications. Behold! instantly a blaze of fire darts forth from heaven. It falls upon the victim; and devours it. How magnificent is such a sight! and how calculated to excite astonishment! But now turn your eyes to the christian sacrifice. Here you contemplate a scene, not wonderful only, but far surpassing wonder. Standing at the altar, the christian priest calls down, not fire, but the Holy Spirit. He calls:—and there descends; not a blazing meteor, but the flame of divine love. It falls upon the victim, and changes it. It is now no longer bread. It is the body of Jesus Christ. This is a truly sublime, and a truly terrific, ministration. The man, who does not revere it, must have lost his understanding.’

Animated by addresses like this, and filled with the spirit of religion, the christian world, accordingly, felt once, as men ought to feel, the obligation of that devotion, which is due to our sacrifice. Borne on the wings of love, all hastened to the place where it was offered. And behold them ranged there in order, round the sanctuary. What silence! what peace! what recollection! No worldly cares, much less any worldly passions, intruded themselves there. These, if the faithful had labored under any, were all laid aside before they entered the sacred spot; or at least, whilst in it, they were forgotten in the earnestness of their devotion. Full of the God, whom they came to adore, they were all

ecstasy, and love. Not a motion ; not a look ; not a thought, that was not the expression, and the fruit of fervor.

Making every allowance for the decays of piety, in our age, I will now briefly say, what ought to be the general tenor of our conduct, each time, that we assist at the divine oblation. To be such as the occasion requires, it should be this:—We should, ere we proceed to perform the important duty, have first disposed the mind to perform it well. We should advance to the scene, where the victim is preparing, impressed with a deep sense of religion, serious, and full of thought. The threshold of the holy place we should enter, with reverence, and profound respect. Arrived within the walls of the sacred mansion, and placed already at the footstool of the sanctuary, we ought now to redouble, if possible, all our interest and attention. The sacrifice begun, we ought, during the few moments which it occupies,—moments so awful, and yet so dear, to piety,—to see nothing ; to feel for nothing, but it alone. It alone should engage our thoughts, and absorb our sensations. Associated now with the minister at the altar ; pleading, along with him, the cause of our salvation ; and with him, offering up the blood of the spotless Lamb,—we should join in all his supplications. It is by way of inducing us to do this, that, eight times during the mysterious rite, he interrupts the solemnity ; and solicits our co-operation. And we, eight times, repeat to him our assurance of it. We ought, in particular now, to awaken in our hearts, and to express, those pious affections, which are adapted to the nature of the holy occasion. We are kneeling, supplicants, before the throne of mercy:—therefore, in the accents of a contrite heart, acknowledging our past ingratitude, we ought earnestly to ask forgiveness. We are paying homage to our Redeemer,—therefore, in the effusions of the tenderest interest, we should tell him, that we love him ; tell him, that we devote ourselves sincerely to his service. We are commemorating the

sacrifice that was offered once on Calvary:—therefore, we should excite those same emotions, that we certainly should have experienced, had we been present at that mournful spectacle. Such are the outlines of that conduct, which ought always to mark our attendance at the celebration of our mysteries. I have said enough of worldly cares. The world,—its cares, its solitudes, its vanities, and its pleasures, ought here to be quite forgotten.

The aim of my reflections on the dispositions with which we should always assist at the holy sacrifice of the Mass, is not so much to censure disrespect, as to conciliate devotion and awaken piety. Since, however, I have mentioned disrespect, I will make one or two observations on it. I do therefore say, that all disrespect in our temples, above all, during the time of Mass, is criminal in a high degree;—the violation, not only of every dictate of faith, but of every maxim of reason. Consulting merely our reason, we must feel, that to bring disrespect to the most holy of all actions,—an action, which is offered up as a tribute of honor to God, and intended to call down blessings upon man,—is at once, both a sin, and an absurdity. Not paganism itself was guilty of such a contradiction:—for, paganism itself had the good sense to feel, that when men affect to worship the Divinity, they should do it with veneration.

But, let this single reflection be to us the evidence, how criminal in the eyes of God must be any act of disrespect, that is committed in a christian sanctuary; and above all, during the time of the christian sacrifice.—It is a fact, with which we are all acquainted, that when Christ Jesus was on earth he manifested a more marked displeasure at an act of disrespect shown only to the Jewish temple, than he did at any other crime. On the occasions of sin in general, he often only wept. He did so, when some of the greatest sinners were brought before him; and even when he viewed all the accumulated abominations of Jerusalem. These evils

excited in his breast the tenderest emotions of compassion. But, when he is witness to the irreverence shown to the house of his eternal Father,—fired with zeal,—he instantly seizes a scourge; and laying aside his usual character of mildness,—indignant, he drives the terrified profaners beyond the inclosure of the sacred place. His mind glows with a holy anger. From these circumstances,—measuring objects by their proper proportions,—we may judge, what the criminality must be of any irreverence committed in a christian sanctuary. For, if the profanation of a place erected for the sacrifice of goats and oxen, inflame the meek soul of Jesus to anger,—if this be the fact,—how much more indignant he must be, and how much more justly offended, at any insult, that is offered to our christian tabernacles,—those blest and tremendous spots, in which his own blood is shed; and where the divinity itself resides!

Wherefore, far from the sacred walls, all irreverence and indevotion. Far thence, the dissipated air, and the wandering eye. Far thence, all levity, and curiosity. And far thence, still more, all vanity, and sin. Let every thing there be grave, and serious. This will be the case, if the light of faith direct us. Oh! did only the light of faith direct us, we should when we assist at our sacrifice, consider ourselves placed immediately in the presence of our Saviour; and enveloped with him in clouds of the brightest glory. Hitherto, if we have been insensible to this honor, and just now the beam of faith were to fall upon us,—we should, precisely as Jacob did, when he awoke from his sleep, exclaim,—‘Truly, the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.’ Any act of indevotion,—did the beam of faith enlighten us,—would absolutely become impossible.

However, be this as it may,—let us, when we assist at Mass, be, not merely not neglectful, but attentive, pious, and fervent. We are offering up a sacrifice;—let us do it, with those dispositions, which become so sublime an action.

We are presenting to the eternal Father the blood of his divine Son;—let us do it, with hands, undefiled as tears can make them. We are kneeling before the throne of our judge;—let us do it, trembling for our sins; and solicitous to appease him. In short, we are performing the first, and dearest obligation of our religion;—let us do it, in that spirit, which religion bids us,—reverence in each motion, gratitude in each sentiment, piety in each thought. Thus, we shall comply with our duty:—thus, induce the divine tenderness to love us:—thus, obtain the grant of whatsoever we may please to ask for.

CHAPTER XI.

ON SPIRITUAL RETREATS.

I SHALL merely introduce this important subject, with a few extracts from the preface to the celebrated Retreat of Bourdaloue, and refer the reader to that excellent work.

During a spiritual Retreat, we interrupt our ordinary occupations, and, laying aside all kind of temporal business, we commune with God alone, on the momentous affair of our salvation. In this silence of all worldly cares, the soul, restored as it were to herself, can, with more ease, rise to the contemplation of God's infinite perfections, and dwell, at leisure, on the eternal truths of christianity. It is then, that, with a holy fear, we humbly call to mind the years that are past, and 'recount them to the Lord, in the bitterness of our soul.'¹—We acknowledge our wanderings, discover their cause, seek for their remedies; and, after bewailing our former transgressions and present sloth, we form strong resolutions and take solid measures to atone for them, and to make further progress in the service and love of God.

The Lord, on his part, is not wanting to us. As soon as, by the help of his grace, we are disposed to listen to him, he makes himself heard, by the most intimate communications. Lights, inspirations, inward illustrations, spiritual consolations—he spares nothing. He represents to us our duties; he reproaches us with our infidelity; he gives us an

¹ Isaias xxxviii. 15.

ardent desire of perfection; he encourages us to realize it, suggests the means, and, by the fervor with which he animates us, alleviates all difficulties.

And let none imagine that, in the world, the exercises of a spiritual retreat are useful only for great sinners, who are not, it would seem, to be reclaimed from their evil ways, by any other means. The truths of religion are always the same, in the main, and for all states and professions. There is no difference except in the application, which every one is to make of them to himself, according to his situation in life, and the peculiarities of his own circumstances. Nay, there is always a number of virtuous souls, who, more regular and more fervent, than the generality of Christians, practise, even in the midst of the world, the greater part of the exercises of the religious profession, and endeavor to come, as near as they can, to the perfection of those who have bound themselves, by solemn vows, to the observance of the evangelical counsels. Now, these chosen souls will derive from spiritual retreats such benefits as they are known to produce in well regulated communities—the knowledge of their duties, according to their vocation, the consolation of their griefs, and the exaltation of their joys.

But notwithstanding the advantages of spiritual retreats, we are still obliged to acknowledge that they are sometimes unfruitful. The reason is, that they are not always performed with the necessary dispositions. For, in general, God acts in us according to the preparation of our hearts: hence the scripture warns us ‘to prepare our soul, before prayer.’

The most essential point in this preparation, that which comprehends all the others, or on which they depend, is an upright intention—a sincere wish to know ourselves well, and to work at our improvement and perfection in the service and love of God. Without this, there is little, or no benefit, to be expected from a retreat. ‘If you seek,

seek.’¹—This expression of the prophet gives us sufficiently to understand how much we should mistrust our pretended good intentions. Often we seek God, or at least, we flatter ourselves that we seek him, though we do not seek him truly;—we imagine that we wish to be his, but we do not wish it sincerely and earnestly.

Let us therefore prove our hearts before we commence a spiritual retreat, and strongly excite in them an ardent desire of a holy renewal of ourselves.

From this first disposition, all the others will follow: animated by this holy desire, we shall punctually observe all the rules which the masters of a spiritual life have laid down for the exact performance of a spiritual retreat. We shall keep a strict silence, banish from our minds all thoughts that might create distractions,—give each exercise, its hour, its place, and all the attention it requires. In fine, we shall give ourselves up entirely to the guidance of the Spirit of God, that he may ‘work in us both to will, and to accomplish, according to his good will.’²—‘The Father of mercies, and the God of all consolation,’³ who seeks even those who ‘flee from his face,’ will not withdraw from one who comes to him.

We should not, however, lay too much stress upon the sensible devotion and pious feelings, which we may experience during our retreat. The most tender affections, and lively sentiments of piety in meditation, are of little avail, if we do not go further and reduce them to practice. For it is practice which sanctifies; and the masters of a spiritual life have never thought much of pious feelings, unless they were accompanied with strong and holy resolutions. They are not even satisfied with this; but they wish, that, not confining ourselves to vague and indefinite purposes of doing better, we should come to particulars and enter into detail, in the resolutions we form; that we should turn our

1 Isaias xxi. 12.

2 Philip. ii. 13.

3 2 Cor. i. 3.

attention to such faults as we are most liable to commit, and resolve to use such means as we know to be the surest to avoid them. Others again, advise us to write down what we have thus resolved, and promised to God, so that, by reading these resolutions, from time to time, we may find in them the condemnation of our infidelities, and future relapses.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY.*

THE spirit of christianity is a spirit of separation from the world, and of consecration to God; in other words, a Christian is, by his profession, separated from the world, and consecrated to God.

SECTION I.

The spirit of christianity is a spirit of separation from the world.

Two things, according to St. Thomas, are essentially requisite to make a Christian—the grace of vocation, on the part of God; and a faithful compliance with that grace, on the part of man—both of which have no stronger characteristic, than separation from the world.

In the first place, the grace of vocation to christianity is a grace of separation from the world; its peculiar attraction and impulse consist in this. Thus, St. Paul, to express the nature of the grace which he received from God in his miraculous conversion, says, ‘He separated me from my mother’s womb;’¹ that is, according to the explanation of St. Ambrose, he chose me to live separated from the corruption of the world. Thus, again, when the Spirit of God bestowed on the first disciples those visible and abundant

* From Bourdaloue.

1 Gal. i. 15.

graces, which raised them to the most holy ministries, he always directed that those who had been chosen, should be separated even from the rest of the faithful,—‘Separate me Saul and Barnabas, for the work to which I have taken them,’¹—as if this separation, adds St. Chrysostom, had been a kind of sacrament, by which the grace of divine vocation was to be imparted to them.

And again, the apostle of the Gentiles, wishing to make us understand the super-eminent and infinite grace of the sanctity of Jesus Christ, sums up all its excellence in one word:—He was ‘separated from sinners.’² But, we know that the sanctity of Jesus Christ is the pattern of our own; and that ours, to be acceptable to God, must be conformable to his. Therefore, since it is true that this Man-God was sanctified by a grace, which fully separated him from the world,—the grace by which we are sanctified, must needs produce a similar effect in us; so that, in consequence of this grace, God may say to us, what he said to the Israelites: You are my people, and it is in this light I view you; but why, and how, are you my people? because I have separated you from every other people of the earth, who live in the darkness of infidelity. Such is the essential characteristic of the grace of our vocation to christianity.—Inasmuch as it proceeds from God, it is a grace of separation.

But, our compliance with God’s grace, must necessarily correspond to the end and object, for which that grace is given. For, as ‘there are diversities of graces,’ and inspirations; so also, ‘there are,’ on the part of man, ‘diversities of operations,’ and duties.³ That is to say, every sort of duty does not correspond to every sort of grace. For instance, if God gives me a grace of resistance and defence against my passions, I cannot comply with that grace, but by resisting and combating them. On the contrary, if he gives me grace to withdraw from the occasions of sin, I cannot be

1 Acts xiii. 2.

2 Heb. vii. 26.

3 1 Cor. xii. 4. 6.

faithful to that grace, but by withdrawing from them. Consequently, as the grace by which God calls me to christianity, is a grace of separation from the world, whatever else I may do, I shall never fulfil the duties of christianity, unless I separate myself from the world, by co-operating with that grace. These two separations should concur, and mine should second that of God, in the same manner as that of God is the principle of mine. Hence follow three practical consequences.

1. It is enough that we are Christians, to be obliged to live in a spirit of separation from the world, that is,—from the false pleasures, the profane joys, the vain intrigues, the luxury, the amusements, the follies, the customs or rather the abuses of the world;—from all that nourishes the corruption, and dissipation of the world;—from all that was meant by the beloved disciple, when he said ‘Love not the world, nor those things which are in the world—the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.’¹ It is enough that we are Christians, I say, to be obliged to separate ourselves from all this. We all know it, and unless we disavow what our sponsors have solemnly promised in our name, at our baptism, and what we have ourselves often ratified since, we cannot deny it.

Hence, when the fathers wished to withdraw the faithful from certain diversions, of which worldlings have at all times been passionately fond, they assigned no other reason, than that they were Christians and separated from the world, and this alone sufficed to persuade them. The theatre, said Tertullian, which is the abode of impurity, makes a separation between the pagans and us; they flock to it, and we abhor it; and this difference is only a consequence of the difference of our religion. In like manner, when he recommended to christian ladies modesty and simplicity in their dress, which may be considered, with regard to them, as the

beginning of their separation from the world, what argument did he use? You are Christians, he said, and by consequence, separated from all that might induce you to take pride in a thing so vain and frivolous as dress; you no longer belong to those assemblies in which people meet for no other purpose, than to see and be seen:—as Christians, you no longer appear in public but to discharge the duties of charity, and piety; to visit the poor who are your brethren, to assist at the sacrifice of your God, and to hear his word. But you are unworthy of the name you bear, if, whilst you edify the heathens by your fidelity to those duties, you do not take still more care to appear adorned with the true ornaments of your sex, which are reserve and modesty.

It is therefore a great and pernicious error, to say, I am of the world; I must live according to the world, and conform to its maxims. It is almost a blasphemy; for the Son of God has expressly declared to you in the gospel, that ‘you are not of the world,’¹ and you dare affirm, in the same sense in which he denied it, that you are of the world. No;—you should reverse the proposition, and say: I am not of the world; because I am a Christian. Therefore, I am no longer allowed to live according to the world, and conform to its maxims;—then, you would speak agreeably to the spirit and the grace of your vocation.

2. The more we separate ourselves from the world, the better Christians we are; for the more we separate ourselves from the world, the more abundantly we partake in the grace of separation, by which we are called to the perfection of christianity. Hence, if religious houses have always been considered as abodes of sanctity, it is because their inmates live in an entire separation from the world. But what are religious houses, fervent and well regulated? They are a particular christianity, says St. Bernard, rescued from the wreck of universal christianity, and preserved by divine Pro-

vidence as a precious remnant and a living memorial of that first christianity, which the pagans themselves revered. On the contrary, the greater our intercourse and connection with the world, the worse Christians we are. Insomuch, that when the fathers of the church spoke of those vain amusements, those frivolous pleasures, and fashionable diversions, not to say fashionable follies, which show attachment to the world, they did not hesitate to affirm, that to indulge in them was a secret apostacy; because, as the grace of faith is a principle of separation from all these things, not to renounce them, is, in some measure, to renounce our faith.

3. It is impossible for a Christian to be truly converted, and to live according to the spirit of his vocation, unless he is determined to divorce himself from the world, more than he did before; for, to wish to maintain with the world the same intercourse, that caused us to lose the fear and love of God, and pretend to walk in the paths of sincere repentance, is a contradiction. How can you, says St. Bernard, 'bring forth fruit worthy of penance,' derive benefit from prayer, assist with devotion at the holy sacrifice of the altar, receive the sacraments worthily, in a word, serve God 'in spirit and in truth,' unless you withdraw from the tumult, the annoyance, and the distractions of the world?

There are two sorts of separations from the world, one exterior, the other interior, and both are required by the spirit of christianity. The former, without the latter, is of no use; for, in vain should we be separated from the world by our dress, our profession, and our mode of living, if our hearts were still attached to it, and our minds filled with its maxims. The heart is first to be weaned from the world. But this is not sufficient—this interior separation, must be accompanied with exterior separation; because, says Saint Gregory, the corruption of the world is such, that the purest and most religious persons, are not altogether secure from

its contagion. Happy, therefore, are they, who, by a peculiar and kind disposition of Providence, have it in their power to live in an entire, or almost entire separation from the world!

But if the duties of our profession oblige us to take an active part in the affairs of the world, and enter the busy walks of life; let us, at least, from time to time, withdraw from our ordinary and even necessary occupations, and apply ourselves exclusively to the great concerns of salvation, after the example of those 'kings and consuls of the earth,' of whom Job says, that 'they build themselves solitudes,'¹ into which they retire from the bustle and turmoils of the world.

Let us separate ourselves from the world, before the world separates itself from us. Let us appear, upon earth, in the same rank that we wish to occupy, on the day of judgment, when the first act of divine justice will be 'to separate the wicked from among the just;'² let us anticipate the effect of this judgment, and separate ourselves from the world, lest God, on that awful day, should separate us from his elect.

SECTION II.

The spirit of christianity is a spirit of consecration to God.

ALL men, says St. Gregory, are subject to the supreme dominion of God; but they are not all, on that account, consecrated to him. This consecration is the effect of the special grace, by which we are made Christians, in the sacrament of baptism.

By the grace of baptism, says Saint Cyprian, we are solemnly consecrated to God, in various ways, which are all calculated to inspire us with respect and veneration for the sacred character which is then imprinted in our souls.—We

1 Job iii. 14.

2 Mat. xiii. 19.

are consecrated, as kings and priests ; as temples, as children, as members of God.

In the first place, baptism consecrates us, as kings and priests : ‘You are a royal priesthood,’ writes St. Peter to the Christians dispersed through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia ;¹ and St. John, speaking of the mystery of our redemption through Christ, says, ‘he hath made us a kingdom and priests to God and his Father.’² At our baptism, we are invested with a right to possess ‘a kingdom,’³ to wear ‘a crown,’⁴ and to sit upon ‘a throne.’⁵

The baptismal unction consecrates us priests of the living God ; because, it not only gives us power, but it lays us under the obligation of offering to God continual sacrifices ;—the sacrifice of our passions, our perverse inclinations, and evil propensities, by self-denial and mortification ;—the sacrifice of our own will, by submission to the dispensations of Providence ;—the sacrifice of our pride, by humility—of our resentment, by charity—of our anger, by meekness. ‘By such sacrifices,’ we may add, in the words of St. Paul, ‘God’s favor is obtained ;’⁶ but, without them, christianity is reduced to a vain and empty shadow. Again, as Christians, we can daily offer the most august of all sacrifices, which is that of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. For, when we hear Mass, we do, really and conjointly with the priest, offer this divine sacrifice ; whence St. Leo concludes that Christians are partakers of the priestly office.

A Christian, by his baptism, is also consecrated to God, as his temple. St. Paul alludes to this doctrine, in several parts of his epistles, as to a truth with which the faithful were well acquainted : ‘Know you not,’ he writes to the Corinthians, ‘that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ?’⁷ Again : ‘Know you not, that

1 1 Epist. ii. 9.

2 Apoc. i. vi.

3 Mat. xxv. 34.

4 2 Tim. iv. 8.

5 Apoc. iii. 21.

6 Heb. xiii. 16.

7 1 Cor. iii. 16.

your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you?'¹ Upon another occasion, wishing to deter them from associating with infidels, he merely asks,—‘What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?’ and adds, ‘You are the temple of the living God.’² Now, this prerogative of being the temples of God, is, properly speaking, the effect of the grace of our baptism alone. For, we are, properly speaking, the temples of God, only inasmuch as we are capable of receiving the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, in which Jesus Christ comes, really and substantially, to dwell within us; but, we are made capable of receiving this sacrament by baptism, in virtue of the sacred character which it imprints in our souls; therefore, it is by baptism that we become the temples of God.

Lastly, by baptism we become children of God, and members of Christ. These are the very expressions of holy scripture, the glorious titles it gives to Christians. ‘You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,’ says St. Paul to the Galatians, ‘for as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ;’³ and to the Corinthians: ‘You are the body of Christ, and members of member.’⁴ ‘Behold!’ exclaims the beloved disciple, ‘what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be named, and should be the sons of God!’⁵

Such is the excellence of the baptismal consecration. Let us now consider the obligation it lays upon us, to lead a life of holiness—and, in truth, what duties can be too arduous, what perfection too sublime, for the children of God! We are unworthy of that name, says St. Ambrose, if we depart from the noble sentiments which the spirit of christianity inspires, and suffer ourselves to be led by the maxims of the world; and we should forever renounce the honor of belonging to God, if we were to content ourselves with pos-

1 1 Cor. vi. 19.

3 Gal. iii. 26. 27.

5 1 John iii. 1.

2 2 Cor. vi. 16.

4 1 Cor. xii. 27.

sessing ordinary virtues. From this principle, Saint Paul bestowed upon all Christians the appellation of saints; and when he wrote to the churches committed to his care, his letters bore this inscription: 'Paul—to all the saints who are at Ephesus'¹—'to all the saints who are at Philippi';² because he considered sanctity inseparable from the profession of christianity. Hence, he seldom used any other motive than this, to induce Christians to preserve inviolate that purity of body and soul, which ought to characterize them. 'Know you not,' he said to them, 'that you are the temple of God?—But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy.'³

And, let us here remark, with Zeno of Verona, that if the temple of God were finished and perfect in us, as it is in the blessed inhabitants of heaven, we should no longer have need to work at our sanctification; but, the structure of this temple, being always to increase and never to terminate, whilst we live upon earth, it is our duty, in order to comply with the views of God, its first architect, to apply to it continually. A truth which St. Paul expresses in these words: 'All the building framed together (in Christ), groweth into a holy temple in the Lord.'⁴—This spiritual temple cannot be raised in us, but by the holiness of our life; hence a holy life, is commonly called an edifying life.

If the priests of the old law were to be holy, because they were appointed to offer incense and bread, what ought not to be the sanctity of Christians, who, in virtue of their vocation, are to make oblations incomparably more noble and dignified? who, to use the language of St. Paul, are to 'present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God?'⁵ who offer him heaven's most precious victim, which is daily laid on our altars for the living and the dead?

1 Eph. i. 1.

3 1 Cor. iii. 16. 17.

5 Rom. xii. 1.

2 Philip. i. 1.

4 Eph. ii. 21.

Another consequence, which necessarily follows from the sacred character of baptism, is awful and alarming. It is, that the sins of Christians contain the peculiar malice of sacrilege. And in fact, what is a sacrilege? It is, according to all theologians, the abuse and profanation of a thing consecrated to God. But, all that is in us, is consecrated to God by baptism; and all the sins which we commit, are so many abuses of ourselves. Consequently, all our sins include a kind of sacrilege of which we become guilty. And, what is the nature of that sacrilege? it is not merely the profanation of a thing consecrated to God, but united, incorporated with God, as a Christian is by his baptism, and according to the principles of our faith. What consideration more powerful than this can be urged, to deter us from sin, and from those sins, in particular, which, at once, defile the body and kill the soul? 'Shall I then,' exclaims St. Paul,—justly indignant that Christians could be guilty of such profanations,—'taking the members of Christ, make them the members of a harlot? God forbid!'¹ It is true that Jesus Christ, who is impeccable in himself,—'holy, innocent, undefiled,'²—cannot become a sinner in us; yet, whenever a Christian sins, it is a member, a brother of Jesus Christ, who sins;—the child of God is defiled; and his temple, polluted.—Thus far Bourdaloue.

Such are the prerogatives, the obligations, and awful consequences, which result from the grace and character of baptism. I shall not dwell any longer upon them, but conclude with the exhortation of St. Paul to the Ephesians: 'I beseech you,' says this great apostle, 'that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called, with all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity,—that henceforward you walk not as also the Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, alienated from the life of God through the ignorance which is in

1 1 Cor. vi. 15.

2 Heb. vii. 26.

them, because of the blindness of their heart. Be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in justice, and holiness of truth. Give not place to the devil ;—grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. Be ye followers of God, as most dear children. You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk ye as children of light—the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and justice, and truth.’¹

1 Eph. iv. v.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE PLEASURES AND DIVERSIONS OF THE WORLD.*

‘AMEN, amen, I say to you, that you shall lament and weep; but the world shall rejoice.’¹ Thus spoke Jesus Christ, foretelling the destiny of his elect, represented by the apostles whom he was addressing, and that of sinners, who are here designated by the world. According to the false and limited views of human wisdom, quite a different distribution, and, indeed, the very reverse of this, might have been expected:—joys, it would appear, should be the lot of the elect, and afflictions, the portion of the reprobate. ‘Tell me,’ said Job to God, in the bitterness of his soul, ‘why thou judgest me so? Doth it seem good to thee that thou should oppress me, and help the counsel of the wicked?’² But, ‘as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are the thoughts of God above our thoughts.’³ It was necessary, for the accomplishment of the designs of God in behalf of his elect, that they should renounce the diversions of the world; because, pleasing and fascinating as they are, they enervate the mind, and corrupt the heart; because, like the fallacious ‘way,’ pointed out in the book of proverbs, whilst to the worldling they ‘seem right, the ends thereof lead to death.’⁴ In other words, because the diversions of the world, even those which seem authorized by public opinion, are, for the most part, opposed to the spirit of christianity, condemned by its principles, and inconsistent with purity of morals. Such are, for instance,—the theatre,—balls,—

* From Bourdaloue.

2 Job x. 2. 3.

4 Prov. xiv. 12.—xvi. 25.

1 John xvi. 20.

3 Isaias lv. 8. 9.

and those public assemblies, where all are welcomed, who are attracted by the desire of seeing and being seen.

Tertullian remarks, in his treatise on public games, that human ignorance is never more presumptuous, than when we are interdicted from the enjoyment of pleasures, in which we have been accustomed to indulge, on the supposition that they were lawful. Then do we place ourselves on guard;—then do we become subtle, and ingenious;—then do we invent a thousand pretexts to sustain our pretended rights,—and, for fear of losing our gratification, persuade ourselves of its innocence, though it be essentially criminal, contrary to the law of God, and inconsistent with the spirit of christianity.

Let us apply this general truth to the diversions, just mentioned. Men, enlightened by the wisdom of the gospel, condemn them; others, misled by the false lights of worldly prudence, approve, and try to justify them. Now this very diversity of opinions, constitutes a sufficient ground for renouncing them; for it proves that, at least, they are liable to suspicion; and since those who maintain that they are dangerous to virtue, are, in other respects, more regular in their conduct, more attached to their duties, more profound in the knowledge of the ways of God, than their opponents,—is it not wiser, and safer to rely on them, and not so slightly risk our salvation?

But there are stronger reasons to decide us. Following the counsel of the Holy Ghost,—‘ask thy father and he will declare to thee, thy elders and they will tell thee,’¹—let us consult those whom God has appointed to instruct us; the fathers of the church. They will teach us truths, which ought to inspire horror for such amusements. They will tell us, that the wisest among the pagans proscribed the theatre, as seductive and injurious;—that to abandon it, was, in the first ages of the church, an authentic mark of Chris-

¹ Deut. xxx.i. 7.

tianity;—that it was not interdicted merely because it was devoted to idolatry and superstition, but because it was a school of vice,—and is it not so, at the present day? is not its contagion more dangerous, as it is more refined and disguised?—Its language, I admit, is more pure, more studied, more guarded; but it no less enervates the mind, and corrupts the heart; and it might perhaps be safer to listen to the coarse excesses of a Jupiter, and the other deities, which, offending by their grossness, would make less impression on the soul.—They will tell us, that it is impossible to keep the baptismal vows, and continue attached to the frivolous pastimes of the world: ‘It is to mock God,’ says St. Cyprian, ‘after having said anathema to the devil, as you did, when you received the grace of Jesus Christ at the sacred font, to pursue the false delights which he offers you at a ball-room or the play-house.’ Finally, they will tell us, that the discipline of the church was so strict in regard to this,—that it was sometimes an obstacle to the conversion of infidels. ‘Insomuch,’ says Tertullian, ‘that they were more estranged from our holy faith by the dread of losing these enjoyments which it condemned, than by the fear of martyrdom, with which its professors were threatened by the cruelty of tyrants.’

Such is the tradition, the opinion, the morality of those holy teachers;—not of one, or a few, but of them all. Upon this, they are unanimous; they have but one voice. Not limited by the circumstances of a particular period,—from age to age, they have continued their prohibition, promulgated their maxims, and fulminated their anathemas. Nor was this the doctrine of weak, ignorant, narrow-minded men, rash, or timid in their decisions. Apart from their sanctity, which entitles them to our veneration,—they were the most distinguished geniuses of the ages in which they lived. We have their writings, and we see in them the sublimity of their wisdom, the penetration of their sagacity, the depth

and extent of their erudition. Again, it was not a morality intended only, as an inducement to perfection, and a mere counsel. If we weigh their expressions, and take them in the most natural and obvious sense, we shall be convinced, that it was inculcated as including a positive precept;—on no other subject, did they speak with more rigor, and vehemence;—to no other abuse, did they attribute more fatal consequences.

And again, these zealous defenders of the pure morality of the gospel, did not support their doctrine by reasons peculiar to themselves;—they urged the same arguments, that are employed to-day;—they had no others. They did not address themselves only to persons of particular situations in life, characters, or dispositions. They made no distinction of ranks, or conditions, or temperaments, or propensities. They spoke to Christians, and they spoke to them all. In vain might this or that one reply to them, what we still hear every day: ‘All that I see and hear, only amuses me; I sustain no injury; I receive no evil impression.’ They treated this vain excuse, as a false and insincere disguise, or, at best, as an error, and illusion;—as a false and insincere disguise, because they knew the most corrupt will frequently hold this language to justify their conduct outwardly, by cloaking the secret disorders of their hearts;—as an error and illusion, for they knew how we love to blind ourselves, and what progress the passions make, while we are not careful to watch and repress them.

What now can the partisans of the world oppose to testimony so express, so convincing, so respectable? whom will they believe, if they submit not to such authority? Would it not be most unwarrantable temerity to pretend that all these holy men have been mistaken; that they have all carried their opinions to extremes; and that we are more enlightened than they? Yet such is the presumption of the age, that,—in a matter which concerns salvation, and on

which every competent and authorized judge has decided,—a few worldlings choose to be responsible to themselves alone, and dare call innocent amusement, that, which these wise guides have pronounced sinful. If the pastors of souls, and the teachers of morality, should, at present, hold principles less rigid upon this subject, than those of antiquity; and if these principles were generally and steadily pursued by the most exemplary Christians, it would perhaps be more excusable to inquire, and deliberate. But such is not the fact. Preachers in the pulpit, directors in the tribunal of penance, doctors in their schools, pastors of souls, ministers of the altar,—all hold still the same language, and they are sustained by all the faithful children of the church.

Again, I ask, who are, now-a-days, the advocates for the theatre, and those promiscuous assemblies, at which, persons who have still a regard to character, meet with those, with whom they would not associate any where else? I have said it,—a few worldlings;—men without religious principles,—dissipated,—selfish idolators of their pleasures;—vain women, whose knowledge is confined to dress,—whose sole desire is to be seen and admired,—whose only anxiety is to pass away time, and avoid the ennui, which besets them when amusements fail;—and, what is often more deplorable,—whose passions seek excitement, when every effort should be made to keep them in subjection. These are the oracles, to which deference is paid, on subjects intimately connected with salvation. These, the teachers, whose lights eclipse all others; whose absolute dogmas appear unanswerable. These are the guides whose directions are followed, by persons who call themselves Christians,—these the securities on which they risk their consciences, their souls, their eternity.

Romances are another sort of amusement, which must be ranked with those already mentioned, as having a similar tendency. To read them is the occupation of the idle and frivolous; and the exaggerated sentiments, the imaginary

adventures and intrigues, which they contain, form the ordinary subject of conversation among them. They store their memories with the most remarkable passages;—and knowing them all, they still continue ignorant. But this is, perhaps, an evil of minor importance. The great mischief is, that nothing is more apt to corrupt the purity of the heart, than these pernicious books. Nothing diffuses through the soul a poison more subtle, more active, and more deadly; whence it follows that nothing ought to be more strictly forbidden. Observation, the confession of those who speak from sad experience, reason,—all concur to establish this conclusion.

In proportion as persons become addicted to such reading, the relish for piety is lost; the heart grows cold to God, and the fervor of devotion is abated. The spirit of the world gradually gains the ascendancy, and the principles of religion are insensibly obliterated from the mind. The imagination is filled with silly conceits,—with gallantry and vanity;—every thing solid, every thing serious, becomes insipid, wearisome, and, finally, odious and disgusting. But I will trace no further these demoralizing influences. One more consideration alone shall suffice. The plot of a romance invariably turns on the weaknesses, the ecstasies, the excesses of love; it abounds in amorous maxims, protestations, and artifices; every interest is represented as secondary to love; glory itself, is sacrificed to it, or rather, it is counted glory to sacrifice all to love. If so, frail and prone to evil as we are, can we dwell habitually on such ideas without danger? are they not calculated to disturb the calm and tranquillity, even of the old, by recalling to their minds, under the most enticing circumstances, the follies and disorders of their youthful days? and can the young identify themselves, as it were, with the fictitious characters delineated in those works, without exciting in their hearts sympathies, feelings, desires, and passions, which it is their duty to regulate and control?

We may be told by some, that they only read romances which treat of virtuous love. But can we call that love virtuous, which takes such possession of a man as to deprive him of reason? which engrosses all his thoughts, exhausts all his cares, and makes him, to the neglect of his Creator, an idolator of a creature? which renders him forgetful of the holiest duties of his nature, of patriotism, of justice, of honor, and of charity? And are not these the results of this pretended virtuous love, as portrayed in romances?

Again, it is said, that this sort of reading accomplishes the young, and makes them acquainted with the world. Is it then so necessary to know the world, that we must renounce salvation for it? And if such be the price of this knowledge, were it not better to remain forever deprived of it, and save our souls? Yes truly,—these books will form us for the world,—but for what world? A sinful, and corrupt world,—a world condemned by Jesus Christ,—and which is the most dangerous enemy against which we have to contend.

Let parents, especially, consider these things.—It is true that religion does not prohibit them from bestowing a few worldly accomplishments on their children, after their earliest care has inspired them with sentiments of christian piety. But, to supply them, under that pretext, with books which will dispose them to all the vanities of the world;—to conduct them to theatrical exhibitions, which enervate the morals in proportion to the sensibility of their youthful hearts;—to introduce them to assemblies,—where the world assumes its most seductive aspect,—where innocence must either blush, or perish,—all this will furnish matter for repentance in this life, and punishment in the next. At first, these things, perhaps, only amuse them. But let the fire kindle, and the sport will become too serious. Will it be time enough then, to check the flame? can parental authority arrest the progress of evils to which itself gave the first impulse? Will groans and lamentations expiate the fault

before God? will it suffice to avow, at his tribunal, a desire to accomplish children and give them the knowledge of the world, when it ought to have been known, that this dangerous knowledge would lead to the ruin of their morals, and the loss of their souls?

After reading this, some perhaps will say, must we then deny ourselves all diversions. My answer to such persons is simply this:—if by diversions they mean pleasures which are either criminal in their nature, or liable to be indulged to excess, or calculated to give scandal,—if they know of no others,—then, there are none but ought to be regarded with horror, and carefully shunned by Christians; because, any one of these characteristics suffices to endanger salvation, and no diversion can compensate for the loss of the soul. Moreover, these diversions will soon have an end, and be followed by eternal misery; whereas the Christian's momentary privations will be exchanged for everlasting happiness: 'Your sorrows shall be turned into joy,'—a solid, durable, and endless joy. With such a hope, ought we to regret the pleasures of the world, or think it costs too much to sacrifice them? Nor are we to apprehend that this sacrifice will lessen the sum of our real enjoyments, even on this earth. Their object, it is true, will be different; but they will be heightened, in proportion as they are purified, and ennobled. 'How great was my happiness,' exclaims St. Austin, 'when I renounced the criminal pleasures of the world! how sweet it was for me to relinquish, what I had so long feared to lose! To have overcome myself, was more delightful to me, than all my former enjoyments had ever been.'

There is a pure, interior and spiritual joy, with which God fills the soul that truly seeks him,—that seeks him only,—that desires to rejoice in him alone;—a heavenly joy, which transcends the capacity of the senses, and which the carnal man cannot comprehend. It is not found in the

turmoil of the world,—in assemblies, and theatres;—it is experienced only in the silence, and repose of a retired and holy life. The more we renounce the diversions of the world, the more this heavenly joy will abound in our hearts; it will penetrate, it will inundate, it will transport them. Such is the promise of God, and for which all the saints that ever have existed are pledges. Did they deceive us, in what they have told us concerning it, or did they deceive themselves?—Was David deceived when he exclaimed, that one day in the house of his God, was better than a thousand passed with sinners, in the midst of pleasures? Was St. Paul, were so many others mistaken, when, after their frequent experience, they assured us that nothing can compare with that secret unction, those unspeakable consolations, which God imparts to all who fear and serve him? Let us believe them,—or rather,—let us believe God, who has promised, if we are willing, to make us happy, both here, and hereafter.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PIETY.*

SINNERS should make an exact search into the sins of which they are guilty, in order to humble and punish themselves for them—‘I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul.’¹ Persons who make profession of piety, and lead a retired life, exempt from the gross disorders of the world, ought attentively to examine before God the imperfection and little solidity of the virtues which they have acquired. Without this examination, which serves to inspire us with humility, fear, and diffidence of ourselves, even our virtues become hurtful to us, or at least, dangerous: they fill us with a presumptuous confidence in our own strength and esteem of ourselves, and cause us to pass our life in a state of perpetual illusions—‘Thou sayest: I am rich, and made wealthy, and I have need of nothing; and thou knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.’²

How many persons do we see, who, upon this vain confidence in their good intentions, pursue a false line of conduct! who are greatly deceived about themselves, and who shock and scandalize their neighbor, while they imagine that they please and edify him! who, to use the words of St. Gregory, persuade themselves that they love in virtue, what they really do not love! Nothing is more awful than these examples, nothing more proper to make us look seriously to ourselves, and study carefully what we are. Perhaps we resemble those deluded persons, whom we pity; and others

* From Fenelon. 1 Isaias xxxviii. 15. 2 Apoc. iii. 17.

have the same opinion of us, that we have of them. Their intentions are good, and they believe themselves in the right; do we not deceive ourselves too? It is self-love which flatters and dazzles them; have we not in us the same seducer? Let us fear, then, to be in that 'way, which seemeth just—but the ends whereof lead to death.'¹ We owe this respect to devotion, to render it irreprehensible in us. So many persons do it injury, by the weaknesses and indiscretions, which they blend with it, that we ought to regulate ours, in such a manner, as to remedy this evil, and repair this scandal.

What do we not owe to piety! 'It is profitable to all things.'² It has freed us from innumerable errors; it has enabled us to conquer our passions, and evil habits; it has made us relish the truths of religion, disgusted us with the pleasures of the world, and protected us against the fatal snares with which it is filled. Shall we be ungrateful to it, after receiving so many benefits? Shall we not have the courage to sacrifice to it our unruly inclinations, whatever it may cost our self-love? However, let us take great care not to judge of our virtue from appearances. The false scales of the world, which the scripture calls 'an abomination before the Lord,'³ are very different from those in which the divine justice weighs all our actions.⁴ God, who penetrates into the inmost recesses of the heart, often sees and condemns in us certain passions, which lie hid under the outward appearances of virtue and religion. He can never be deceived by the external acts of superficial piety. Let us, therefore, be careful not to content ourselves with these equivocal signs; and see if the essentials of piety be discernible in our sentiments and in our actions—of a piety useful to all, simple, disinterested, and constant; that does

1 Prov. xiv. 12. 3 Prov. xi. 1.

2 1 Tim. iv. 8. 4 Ps. vii. 10. lxi. 10. Osee xii. 7. Heb. iv. 13. Apoc. iii.

good, and hides it; that 'seeks not to please men,'¹ or wishes to please them, only for God's sake—of a piety, in short, that goes so far as to forget itself, and attends solely to the correction of its faults, and the fulfilment of its duties.

We shall make this examination with regard to God, to ourselves, and to our neighbor.

SECTION I.

The characteristics of piety with regard to God.

EVERY one should examine himself, in order to ascertain if he is in that disposition in which he ought to be, with regard to God, and without which, all his piety, however fervent it may appear, can have no solidity.—Do we love to suffer for God?—are we willing to die, that we may be united with him?—do we love to think of him?—are we fully determined to give ourselves up entirely to him? Our answer to these questions will show the true state of our hearts.

I. Do we love to suffer for God?—I do not speak of a certain vague love of sufferings, appearing in words, but wanting in actions; of a love of sufferings, which consists in nothing else than a habit of speaking pompously and emphatically of the value and excellence of crosses, whilst we shun them with pusillanimity, and seek after all the comforts of life. Nor do I allude to that imaginary spirituality, which makes us talk of nothing but resignation, patience, joy in tribulations, and the like topics, whilst we are sensibly affected by the slightest inconveniences, and use every means to have nothing to bear from any one, and to be in want of nothing. St. Paul was animated by sentiments very different from these, when he wrote to the Corinthians, that 'he

was filled with comfort and exceedingly abounded with joy,' although 'his flesh had no rest,' and 'he suffered all tribulation—combats without, fears within.'¹

And let us not imagine that the zeal of this great apostle should not be imitated by us, under the pretext that our minds are less strong and less elevated, and our vocation less sublime. 'To you it is given,' he said to all the faithful, 'not only to believe in Christ, but also to suffer for his sake.'² That is: if you submit only your minds to God, by believing all his mysteries, your sacrifice is imperfect, and your will still remains free and unmortified. Be not satisfied with offering to God a steril faith; add to it the oblation of a heart, humbled and suffering for him.³ In vain do you follow Jesus Christ, if you do not carry the cross with him; in vain will you hope for his glory and kingdom, if you refuse to share in his humiliations and sorrows.⁴

These two states have a necessary connection with each other; we cannot arrive at the former, but by passing through the latter: it is the road which Jesus followed—he did not wish to leave us another.⁵ Would you dare complain of a law, which is founded upon such a precedent?⁶ How sweet it must be for the pious to suffer in this life, when they know that they suffer with Christ, to imitate him, to please him, and to merit the joys which he has promised to those who mourn!⁷

All our happiness, says St. Cyprian, consists in suffering evils in this world, with the hope of eternal consolation—'Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation.'⁸ The deceitful enjoyments of this life are left to those who expect and seek none more real: the evils of this world are destined, by the mercy of God, for those chosen souls, whom he wishes to

1 2 Cor. vii. 4. 5.

2 Philip. i. 29.

3 Ps. l. 19.

4 Mat. xvi. 24. Luke xxiv. 26.

5 1 Pet. ii. 21.

6 Mat. v. 12.

7 Mat. v. 5. Luke vi. 21.

8 Rom. xii. 12.

detach from its corruption, and prepare for endless and inestimable blessings. To seek happiness on this earth, is to forget that we are in exile, and renounce the hopes of our country. Hence the same saint said to all Christians, that, by taking this venerable name, they devoted themselves to all kinds of present and sensible sufferings, to wait for invisible and eternal blessings; and, that the heirs of a crucified Saviour, were not permitted to fear either punishments or death.

He calls them heirs of one crucified, because the Saviour, when immolating himself for the love of men, left his true children no other inheritance, in this world, than the cross, that is to say, sorrow and humiliation. What a frightful inheritance!—Jesus ‘filled with reproaches,’¹ naked, and dying on the cross! Yet, we must renounce his heavenly inheritance, if we do not accept this temporal heritage of suffering and humiliation. ‘For, through many tribulations, we must enter into the kingdom of God.’²

These are truths which we often tell to others, but which, perhaps, we seldom tell ourselves. Let us candidly compare the real sentiments of our hearts with these principles of the religion which we profess.

If I were truly persuaded that a christian life, is a life of patience, and continual renouncement of our own inclinations; if I sincerely loved Jesus Christ, suffering and humbled for me, would I refuse to humble myself and suffer for the love of him? Would I content myself with speaking of crosses, when there are none to be borne? would I give others lessons on their utility, without applying them to myself, when opportunities offer? Would I be so impatient in sickness, so discouraged in troubles, so uneasy in difficulties, so sensibly affected by the infidelity and ingratitude of my friends? So jealous, so suspicious, so unwilling to forgive? so severe in correcting others, and so indulgent to

1 Lament. iii. 30.

2 Acts xiv. 21.

myself? Would I be so prone to murmur when I meet with opposition, disappointment, and humiliation?

Is it not a scandal, which should draw tears from our eyes, and pierce our hearts with sorrow, to see persons, who profess to be the followers and servants of Christ crucified, have so much aversion to sufferings, as to deserve to be called, in the words of St. Paul, 'Enemies of the cross?'¹ Can we separate Jesus Christ from the cross on which he died for us, and on which he designed to fasten us with him? Can we love the Saviour without loving the cross, which will be the eternal token of his infinite love for us? O precious cross! must thou be, then, honored in words only, and appearance! Shall those who can expect no grace here, nor glory hereafter, but through thee, fear and shun thee, with so much cowardice!

How long shall we authorize by our conduct the common reproach, so injurious to true devotion, and but too often well-founded, that persons who profess to be religious, are the most selfish and wedded to their own ease; that they wish to serve God, without subjecting themselves to any inconvenience; and hope to possess the happiness of the next life, at the same time that they enjoy all the comforts of this; that, whilst they zealously declaim against self-love, they take every precaution never to mortify it in themselves?

II. Are we willing to die, to be united with Christ?—St. Paul, who felt this noble desire, wished that a Christian, prompted by the hopes of religion, should groan and sigh under the weight of his mortal body.² And St. Austin, explaining this truth in its full extent, remarks, that holiness of life and the love of death are two inseparable dispositions. The two loves of the two lives, says he, contend with one another in imperfect Christians. The love of this transitory life is so strong in them, that they possess it with

¹ Philip. iii. 18.

² Philip. 1. 2. 3. Rom. vii. 24.

pleasure, and lose it with regret. On the contrary, the perfect bear life with difficulty, and await death as their real good. And, let not these imperfect Christians tell me, he adds, that they desire to live longer, in order to become more virtuous; let them speak more sincerely, and avow, that they desire to prolong their life, because they are not virtuous enough to love death. Not to wish to die, is no proof that we aspire to a higher degree of virtue; but it is a sure sign that we have made but little progress in it. Let none then, allege the fear of God's judgments, to justify that of death. If we feared only the judgments of God, in our passage to eternity, this fear, inspired by the Holy Ghost, would be a moderate, peaceable, and religious fear. The perfection of our love for God, according to St. John, prompts us to place an entire confidence in him, on the day of his judgment.¹ If we loved him as our father, should we fear him as our judge? should we experience those cowardly fears, which trouble and prostrate us? Should we be so much alarmed, as soon as the Lord knocks at our door, and warns us, by sickness, of the approach of death?

What! are we not convinced, that the longer we live, the more we increase the number of our infidelities, and swell our account with God? that the future will serve less to pay our ancient debts, than to contract new ones, perhaps, to render us insolvent? and that he, who loves Jesus Christ, should fear the duration of a life, in which he is continually exposed to lose his grace, and displease him?

But there is a sort of infidelity, latent at the bottom of our hearts, which stifles all these sentiments. We bewail the death of those we love, and we fear our own, as if we had no hope. Judging from the vain projects which we devise for this wretched and precarious life, and viewing the care we take to render it agreeable and long, who could believe that we expect another, happy and eternal, and that

1 John iv. 17.

it only serves to delay our happiness? Alas! says St. Cyprian, I am not astonished that they who find themselves happy in this world, wish to remain in it; nor that they who confine their hopes to this life, fear to see it end. Death is a real evil to those who do not wish to be united with Jesus Christ, and who do not hope to reign with him in eternity. But how can they, to whom religion points out a sure way to a new life, and 'whose hope is full of immortality,'¹ reconcile expectations, so great and so solid, with the frivolous amusements, which captivate their hearts here below?

Let us therefore conclude, that our faith and piety must be weak indeed, if they cannot conquer our timidity with regard to death. We must take a very imperfect and superficial view of the eternal resource of christianity against death, and of all the blessings that await us beyond this transitory life, if we feel within us no anxiety to end our miseries, and enjoy these blessings.

The thing, on which every one ought to examine himself, is plainly this: Am I ready to die? and if I were, at this moment, called out of this world, would I willingly bid adieu to all creatures? Is there not something, with regard to which, I have, until now, believed myself to be indifferent, and from which, however, I could not part without difficulty? Does my soul languish under the heavy chains, that hold her captive on this earth? Does she not, on the contrary, delight in these chains, and love her slavery?

I must not here deceive myself by a false courage. Is it really true, that the ardor of my love for Jesus Christ, surpasses, in my heart, the natural fear and horror I have of death? Do I 'use this world, as if I used it not?' Do I regard it as a fleeting shadow—'a figure that passeth away?'² Do I impatiently desire to be no longer subject to its vanities? Is there nothing that weakens this desire, and flatters

my self-love? Do I not seek to render my life agreeable, by the enjoyment of pleasures, which I call innocent, but which form, in my heart, against the designs of God on me, certain ties, which I am unwilling to break? In fine, do I, every day, seriously prepare for death, and regulate my life accordingly? Will death, when it shall come, and surround me with its terrors, find me prepared to bear the fatal stroke with constancy? Shall I not tremble at its approach? What will become of my fortitude in those last moments, when I shall see myself between the world, vanishing forever from my sight, and eternity, opening to receive me?

The consoling hope of seeing Jesus Christ, and being forever inseparably united with him, should, undoubtedly, suffice to strengthen and comfort us on the threshold of eternity. Whence is it then, that often those who profess to despise life, do not fear death less than others? that the least bodily infirmity alarms and disconcerts them, and that they sometimes take more precaution, and show more anxiety for the preservation of their health, than the lovers of the world? Must we not own this to be a shame, and a real scandal? Is it not in vain that they prepare for death, by a pious and retired life, if this preparation leaves them in trouble and trepidation as its approach?

III. Do we love to think of God?—that is, do we feel a sincere joy, when we pray to him, and meditate, in his presence, on the truths of religion?

Prayer, says St. Austin, is the measure of love. He who loves much, prays much; he who loves little, prays little. He, whose heart is closely united to God, has no sweeter consolation, than not to lose sight of his presence; he is delighted in being able to speak to him, to adore his greatness, to admire his power, to praise his mercy, and to trust to his Providence. In this intercourse with her bountiful father, the soul pours out into his bosom all her troubles and anxieties. This is her resource in all the evils of this

life : from humbly laying open before him her weaknesses and her desires, she derives strength and comfort. As we are always imperfect in this world, and never free from sin, our whole life should be spent in doing penance for our faults, and giving thanks to God for his goodness; and it is in the exercise of prayer, that we are able thus to beg his pardon for our ingratitude, and thank him for his mercy.

Besides this necessity of prayer, St. Chrysostom speaks of another, which he explains in a manner equally solid and moving.

After having remarked, that piety is never firmly established in the heart, but by fidelity to prayer, he says : God wishes to make us feel, by this experience, that we cannot obtain his love, but from himself; that this love, which is the true happiness of our souls, cannot be acquired, either by the reflections of our minds, or by the natural efforts of our hearts, but by the gratuitous effusion of the Holy Ghost. Yes, this love is so great a blessing, that God, jealous, as it were, of his gifts, wishes to bestow it himself, and grants it only to those who ask him for it.

Therefore, it is by constantly and faithfully applying to him for this love, that we shall be filled with it. We must lay the blame upon ourselves, if our piety has not that solidity and consistency, which are the sure fruit of fervent and assiduous prayer; for without this exercise, in which we strongly impress upon our minds all the truths of religion, and habituate ourselves to love and follow them, all the pious sentiments that we may have are nothing but a deceitful and momentary fervor.

Let us pray then, but let us always have our duties in view, in our prayers. Let us not make sublime and abstract prayers, which have no reference to the practice of virtue. Let us pray, not to be more enlightened, and spiritual in words, but to become more humble, more docile, more

patient, more charitable, more modest, more pure, and more disinterested in our conduct.

Without this, our assiduity in prayer, far from being beneficial and efficacious, will be a source of illusion to us, and a scandal to our neighbor. A source of illusion to us—The proofs of this assertion are but too numerous: how many persons there are whose prayers serve only to nourish their pride, and mislead their imaginations! A scandal to our neighbor—For can there be any thing more scandalous than to see a person who always prays, and never corrects himself of his faults? who rises from his devotions, neither less frivolous, nor less vain, nor less capricious, nor less proud and selfish, than he was before?

IV. Are we determined to give ourselves up entirely to God?—Do we look upon the care of his Providence over us, as our best resource? On the contrary, do we not rely for the success of our undertakings on the timid and improvident suggestions of our own mind, and thereby render ourselves unworthy of God's help and protection?

The greater part of those who wish to give themselves to God, act as the young man, spoken of in the gospel.¹ He had spent his youth in innocence; and having been trained from his infancy to the faithful observance of the law, he aspired to what is most perfect and heroic in the practice of evangelical counsels. Every thing seemed happily combined to raise him to an eminent sanctity—'Jesus looking upon him,' says St. Mark, 'loved him.' But a secret attachment to the perishable goods of this world, overthrew all the work of his perfection, at the very moment when it appeared that it ought to have been completed. No sooner had Jesus Christ proposed to him to part with his riches and follow him, than his covetous soul was terrified at the idea of a state in which he would no longer be permitted to possess any thing, and 'he went away sorrowful.'

¹ Mat. xix. 16.—Mark x. 17.

He was 'sorrowful,' say the holy fathers, because he could not reconcile, in his weak heart, the love of riches, with the love of Jesus Christ.

The disposition essential to one who consecrates himself to God, is, to mistrust, without any exception, all human resources upon which the prudence of the flesh depends, and to wish nothing that may obstruct the designs of Divine Providence.

We must incessantly repress that natural eagerness, which keeps us in constant dread of losing what we have, and continually prompts us to desire, without moderation, that which we have not.

We must always be on our guard against the subtleties of self-love, that tries to make up for the sacrifices which it has made to God, in matters of importance, by a more tenacious attachment to things of little moment. For what can be more deplorable than to see a person, who has overcome the greatest difficulties in the way to perfection, cowardly look back, and apprehend doing too much?

And yet, can we say that many are free from this pusillanimity? Is it not true that most persons use so many reservations in the gift they make of themselves to God, that they reduce it almost to nothing? With them, what is temporal goes invariably before what is spiritual. They wish to accomplish their duties, and satisfy their consciences; but, they wish it on so many conditions, they are so much afraid it will cost them too much to give themselves to God, they foresee so many inconveniences, they would secure to themselves so many resources and consolations, that they insensibly annihilate christian piety, and follow a mere shadow of it, without any benefit to their souls.

Whence is it that so many people undertake good works without any success? It is because they undertake them with little faith; because they always look to themselves in what they do, and are not willing to prefer, in every

thing, the interest of the work—which is that of God—to their ill-regulated desires and capricious inclinations, to the weakness of their hearts which seeks for vain consolations, to dangerous friendships which they should break, to a certain pride of authority and pre-eminence, which spoils the best things: in a word, it is because they always wish to serve God, with safety to themselves, to run no risk for his glory, and would believe themselves unhappy if they were to suffer any loss, or to meet with any disappointment for his sake. I do not, however, mean to say that we are not allowed to take proper measures for the management of good works: but, truly, there is a great difference between not wishing to tempt God, and irritating him by an injurious diffidence of his goodness. Can we expect from these timid and mercenary souls, that generosity and strength, which are necessary to promote the designs of God? When we do not confide in Providence, we are unworthy to be its instruments.

God, who is ‘Lord over all,’ imparts his divine riches with profusion: but it is to ‘them, that call upon him,’¹ that trust only in him, and not to those cowardly Christians, who wish to forestall Providence, and never to be reduced to depend upon its protection.

SECTION II.

The characteristics of piety with regard to ourselves.

To ascertain whether the characteristics of true piety are to be found in our disposition with regard to ourselves, let us examine, whether our zeal be not imprudence, under the pretext of religion—our prudence, earthly policy—our de-

¹ Rom. x. 12.

votion, the effect of natural inclination—our charity, an amusement.

I. Is not our zeal imprudent?—‘Let all bitterness and indignation, be taken away from you,’ says St. Paul.¹ There is a restless and bitter zeal, which must be amended. It aims at correcting every body, and indiscriminately reforming every thing: to see it act, one would suppose that all mankind are subject to its laws, and censure. We need but know its origin and effects, to discover how badly it is regulated. The origin of this pretended zeal is disgraceful! the faults of our neighbor clash with our own—our vanity cannot put up with that of others—our pride makes us find theirs ridiculous and insupportable—our restlessness rouses us against the idleness and indolence of this person—our sullen disposition is annoyed by the unbecoming gaiety of that person, and our roughness of manners by the affected politeness of another. If we were without faults, we should not be so easily provoked by those of our fellow-beings.

It is even certain that this contrariety and conflict, between our defects and those of our neighbor, greatly magnify the latter in our imagination. And can there be a more base and more corrupt source of that censorious zeal, which I have just described? If we were honestly to avow, that we have not enough of virtue to bear patiently with all the imperfections and weaknesses of our neighbor, we should appear weak ourselves, and this is what our vanity apprehends. We therefore wish that our weakness should, on the contrary, pass for strength; we make a virtue of it, and call it zeal;—an imaginary, and often hypocritical zeal; for is it not astonishing to see how calm and indifferent we are about the faults of our neighbor, when they do us no harm, and how easily this admirable zeal is kindled in us, when our jealousy is excited, or our patience tried by them?—an

1 Eph. iv. 31.—Heb. xii. 15.

accommodating zeal, which is exerted only in our behalf, and to take advantage of the faults of others in order to raise ourselves above them. If our zeal were real, and regulated by christianity, it would always begin with ourselves; we should be so occupied in correcting our own defects and weaknesses, that we should have but little time to think of the faults of others; nothing but conscience could induce us to examine the conduct of our neighbor; and even when we are in duty bound to watch over him, we would do it with much caution with regard to ourselves, according to the advice of St. Paul: 'Brethren,' he says, 'if any man be overtaken in any fault, you who are spiritual, instruct such a one in the spirit of mildness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.'¹ By wishing to correct his ill-temper, we run the risk of yielding to our own; and whilst we endeavor to repress his pride and his other passions, we may suffer ourselves to be carried away by our impatient and haughty disposition.

Let not the care we bestow upon the improvement of others, make us neglect that which we ought to take of our own.

It would be a very imprudent zeal to forget our own spiritual wants, and apply ourselves, exclusively, to the examination of our neighbor's conduct. I know that the zeal, which prompts a Christian to exercise fraternal correction, when it is pure and prudent, is pleasing to God; but we should not believe it to be disinterested, and 'according to knowledge,'² unless it be always accompanied with mildness, and moderation; for that zeal which kindles against our neighbor, and will not bear with any of his failings, serves only to disturb the peace of society, and to give scandal.

Whatever is said or done, with passion, is ill-calculated to contribute to the amendment of our neighbor.

Did we ever see any good effects result from a harsh behaviour? In the cause of religion, the heart is what we must gain; and hearts are only gained by charity, and condescension. It is not enough that we are in the right: we disgrace reason, and do it an injury, when we defend it with petulance and haughtiness. It is by mildness, by patience, and by kindness, that we insensibly conciliate to ourselves the good will of others, prepare them to hear the truth, put them on their guard against prejudices which they have long entertained, inspire them with necessary confidence, and encourage them to conquer their bad habits.

When the man who needs correction, sees that he who reproves him is under the influence of ill-humor, he feels little disposed to overcome his own. Self-love is sure to revolt against the best advice, when it is given with anger and bitterness: God himself will never give his blessing to it. 'The anger of man,' says St. James, 'worketh not the justice of God.'¹

II. Is not our prudence, earthly policy?—That blind wisdom, which the flesh inspires, is 'death,' says St. Paul; 'it is not subject to the law of God, nor can it be.'² There is an absolute incompatibility between this worldly wisdom, and that of the true children of God: it resists the Holy Ghost, it grieves him, and thwarts all his designs for the sanctification of our souls.

This self-sufficient wisdom, which trusts to its own lights, though often reprobated in the gospel, is still rooted in the hearts of most Christians, and deprives them of the greatest gifts of God. How many human considerations, that daily arrest the progress of the works of God! To how many formalities and imaginary decorums, are the most sacred duties of religion, daily sacrificed!

In former times, Christians despised the ill-founded contempt of the world: at present, they fear its judgments,

1 Chap. i. 20.

2 Rom. viii. 6. 7.

court its approbation, and regulate their conduct according to certain whimsical prejudices, by which it is guided in bestowing praise, or dealing out censure and abuse.

The Christians of our days have, it seems to me, carried this timidity with regard to the judgments of the world, to a degree of pusillanimity and baseness, unheard of in past ages.

The good works calculated to promote the glory of God, and the regulation of the piety of individuals, are made to depend upon a thousand human considerations : we dare not undertake, for the interest of religion, any thing but what is agreeable to the notions of the world.

Yes, the world itself, that enemy to God, is daily consulted, on the most holy things. Not only do we consult it, not to give it scandal, which is a necessary precaution ; but we consult it, to accommodate ourselves to its vain maxims, and to make our good works depend upon its decisions. This earthly prudence has found its way even into the souls of those who live a retired and religious life, and have withdrawn themselves from the gay circles, and fashionable follies of the world. How often do we see them anxious to obtain the approbation and applause of persons of high standing, to enjoy their confidence, and insinuate themselves into their good graces ! How eager they are to promote their own interests, to realize their hopes, to fulfil their designs ! how elated by success ! how cast down by the least disappointment !

If we serve God after this manner, we serve him feebly ; we divide our heart and care between him and a thousand things, that are unworthy our attention, and should be beneath our notice, when we have once devoted ourselves to the service of the Almighty. God is then obliged to wait for the opportunities, upon which we make what we wish to do for him depend ; and not only is he obliged to wait, but he often meets with a refusal. We seek his glory, we

wish to do good; but it is only upon certain conditions, which render our best purposes entirely useless.

We drag a feeble and languid will to the practice of virtue, says St. Austin, which pleases our minds, without changing our hearts.

Who is there among us who desires perfection, as it ought to be desired? Who desires it more than his pleasure, more than his reputation? who desires it so as to be ready to sacrifice to it all gratifications that are contrary to its attainment?

Let us endeavor, for the future, to regulate our prudence by the Spirit of God; let it not be the artful combination of disguised self-love, vanity, and presumption. Let us be prudent, that we may do good; but simple, that we may fly from, and even be ignorant of, what is evil.¹ Let us be prudent, but with due deference for our neighbor, and diffidence in ourselves. Let us be prudent, but let our prudence be exercised to promote the glory of God, to recommend religion, and to forget ourselves.

III. Is not our devotion the effect of natural inclination?—St. Paul, foretelling the evils with which religion was threatened, says, that in the last days, ‘men shall be lovers of themselves.’² This is what we see every where: men who relinquish the world and its vanities, to indulge in enjoyments still more vain and frivolous; men who seek retirement, to gratify their unsociable, and sullen disposition; men who are modest and peaceable, rather through weakness than virtue. Although there is but one gospel, yet each one adapts it to his own peculiar inclinations; and whilst we should continually do violence to our natural disposition, to conform it to that holy rule, we, on the contrary, use every means to bend the rule, and even to break it, in order to conform it to our inclinations and interests.

I know that the grace of Jesus Christ is ‘manifold,’ as St.

1 Rom. xvi. 19.

2 2 Tim. iii. 1. 2.

Peter speaks,¹ and assumes various forms in different minds; but, after all, the essentials of religion are necessarily the same; and although the ways of going to God and obeying him are different, according to the different dispositions of our minds, yet, the various practices of religion should always meet at one fixed point, make us observe the same law, and unite us in a perfect conformity of sentiment.

But where can we find this admirable conformity? We see every where persons who disfigure religion, by wishing to adapt it to their own caprices. One is fervent in prayer, but he is hard and insensible to the miseries and weaknesses of his neighbor; another talks of nothing but the love of God and self-denial, whilst he is not willing to bear the least contradiction, or disappointment. Another loves to pray; but it is to fill his mind with useless, chimerical, and often dangerous speculations. And again, some, says St. Jerom, will deprive themselves of things that are allowed, to justify, in their own minds, the enjoyment of those that are forbidden, not understanding that if we offer any thing to God over and above justice, it ought never to be done to the prejudice of justice itself.

This person will be fervent and scrupulous about works of supererogation, whilst he is careless and unfaithful in the discharge of the most important and sacred duties;—he will mortify his body by fast and abstinence, on days when there is no precept for it, and practise all kinds of austerities; but he will take no care to subdue his temper, and soften the harshness of his behaviour;—he will give himself unnecessary trouble about those with whom he lives, and neglect his own business;—he will never be tired of praying and meditating in his closet; but, in church, to which duty calls him, he will give way to distractions, sloth, and ennui.

It even often happens, through a strange disorder of the mind, that our works of supererogation inspire us with a

rash confidence. When we do what is not commanded, we are easily led to think, that we may dispense with doing what is of strict obligation.

This person, who practises extraordinary bodily mortifications, fancies that he has a right to wound and hurt the feelings of others; as if, because he keeps his body in slavery, he were allowed to give his mind the liberty of censuring, and annoying his neighbor.

Is it not a thing truly deplorable to see persons wish to be highly thought of, because they practise certain virtues, and consider the violence, which they do themselves in some instances, as a title to control the inclinations of others, and to gratify their own predominant passions? It would certainly be far preferable to confine ourselves to our duties, and fulfil them with simplicity and fidelity, than presumptuously to meddle with the conduct of our fellow-beings.

It is better to be indulgent with one-self and with others, than to be both so zealous, and so vexatious. Place every virtue in its proper rank: practise, according to the measure of grace which has been given you, the most difficult virtues; but do not wish to practise them at the expense of your neighbor. Charity and justice are the first of all human virtues: why cherish and practise the others to the prejudice of these? Be austere, but be humble; be full of zeal for the reformation of abuses, but be mild, charitable, and compassionate. Do, for the glory of God, all that your love for him will prompt; but begin by the duties of the state of life in which he has placed you: without this, your virtues will only be mere whims and fancies; and by wishing to glorify God, you will scandalize every body.

But presumption and caprice, are not the only characteristics of the devotion of our age; it is also distinguished by two other disgraceful features,—idleness, and the love of

our own ease. For many, it is a pretext to lead an easy, idle, and obscure life,—a resting place, in which their vanity and sloth are freed from the agitation, and slavery of the world.

And what kind of piety is this, that excludes penance and humiliation? that looks upon devotion as a source of spiritual consolation, and a solace amid the griefs and tribulations of this life; but never sincerely seeks, in its practice, that magnanimous spirit, which animates and supports a Christian in the severest trials?

No, says St. Jerom, we will never consent to let the world have so mean an idea of piety. Whatever may be the erroneous notions of certain persons with regard to its practice, we shall always maintain against them, that it is neither idle, nor pusillanimous. The Son of God has said it, the kingdom which he promises, can be obtained only by violence.¹

IV. Lastly, is not our charity an amusement?—Are not our friendships vain, and ill-regulated? is it not true, as St. Chrysostom remarks, that we are oftener unfaithful to God by our friendships, than by our enmities? For, says he, there is a terrible law, which forbids us to hate our neighbor; and when we discover in ourselves feelings of hatred and revenge, we are justly alarmed at our danger, and hasten to be reconciled to our brother. But it is not so with our friendships—we find that there is nothing more sweet, more innocent, more natural, more conformable to charity, than to love our neighbour—religion itself serves as a pretext to the temptation.

Thus, we are not sufficiently on our guard in forming friendships—we often form them almost without reflection, and without following any other rule, than a blind prejudice, or a whimsical inclination.

Do we give to every thing we love the place which it ought to have in our hearts? Are our friendships regulated by our faith? Do we love those persons most, whom we can lead to God, or who can lead us to him? Do we not, in the choice of our friends, merely seek our own pleasure and amusement?

Alas! how frivolous are our friendships! how much time lost in expressing feelings of regard, esteem, and affection, which often we do not really experience! Again, how many professions, disclosures, and effusions, both useless and dangerous!

I know that we are permitted to love those most, who are either more deserving of our affection by their good qualities and real merit, or with whom we are more closely united by the dispensations of Providence; but we must be sober, and cautious in these friendships. They must proceed from the heart; but they must be discreet, moderate, and always under the control of the general law of charity. They should be manifested outwardly, only so far as it is necessary to show esteem, cordiality, and gratitude, without any of those exaggerated marks and expressions of tenderness, affection, and partiality, which betray affectation, weakness, enthusiasm, or blind attachment. The most holy friendships should be kept within these bounds.

SECTION III.

The characteristics of piety with regard to our neighbor.

As regards our external conduct towards our neighbor, we have three things to do—to be humble—to act—to suffer.

I. We must be humble—Humility is the foundation of that peace which we are bound, ‘as much as in us, to have with

all men.’¹ As ‘God resisteth the proud,’² so the proud always resist one another, says St. Chrysostom. Pride is incompatible with pride: it is the source of the divisions which disturb society; and as to the works that are undertaken for the glory of God, they are all necessarily founded on humiliation, and they cannot be promoted by any other means, than those which the Son of God himself chose to accomplish his great work—the establishment of the church.

We should be ‘subject to every human creature, for God’s sake,’³ as St. Peter says. We should conquer all kinds of difficulties, by constant patience, and constant humility. We should always be ready to do any thing, though ever so humiliating, that justice or charity may require of us; and undertake, with great diffidence of ourselves, what is calculated to conciliate to us the approbation and praise of the world, even when our duty compels us to act. We should sincerely love to be forgotten by the world and to live in obscurity, and regard that situation, as the happiest and safest that could fall to our lot. We should renounce from our hearts all desire of reputation for talents, learning, merit, or virtue, that might lead us to take a secret complacency in ourselves,—the vile and unworthy recompense of the sacrifices which we have made for God’s sake,—and ‘be little in our own eyes.’⁴

We must guard against a certain subtle, and secret pride, which renders those who are tainted with it, presumptuous, disdainful, and censorious; leads them astray, and renders them incapable of uniting with others in the prosecution of good works.

We must stifle, at the bottom of our hearts, growing jealousies, petty seekings of our own honor, vain desires to please, to succeed, to be praised, fears of seeing others pre-

1 Rom. xii. 18.

2 1 Pet. v. 5.

3 1 Pet. ii. 13.

4 2 Kings vi. 22.

ferred to us, the wish to decide and act by ourselves, the natural passion for governing, and making our sentiments prevail over those of others.

Ever since Jesus Christ, according to the doctrine of St. Paul,¹ by calling all men, has rendered all conditions equal, all those distinctions that flatter self-love and ambition, says St. Chrysostom, are excluded by christianity. God having made no difference among men in the distribution of his most precious gifts, it is in vain that some pretend to be distinguished from the others, by advantages which have no reality. Let us, therefore, forget ourselves, and our imaginary rights to distinction and preference; and, 'in humility, esteem others better than ourselves, each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's.'²

These rules are soon given; but they are not so easily observed. Nature must be entirely subdued by grace, before we can practise them to their full extent, and preserve, on all occasions, such simplicity and humility.

Not only pride, but a natural haughtiness and sensitiveness of disposition, renders this practice extremely difficult. Instead of respecting their neighbor, with a true sentiment of humility, some persons' charity goes no farther than to bear with him, through a sort of compassion, which looks very much like contempt.

II. We must act—Whilst the short and precious time of this life is at our disposal, let us hasten to employ it. Whilst any remains, let us not fail to devote it to good works.

For when every thing else shall have vanished forever, the works of the just 'will follow them' beyond the grave.³ And again, it is certain, according to the forcible language of St. Paul, that 'we have been created in Christ Jesus unto

¹ Rom. x. 12;—1 Cor. vii. 22. 25.

³ Apoc. xiv. 13

² Phil. ii. 3. 4.

good works—that we should walk in them,¹ that is, spend our whole life in that happy employment.

Let us therefore do good, according to the state of life in which God has placed us, with discernment, with courage, and with perseverance. With discernment; because, although charity wishes to go as far as the greater glory of God can require, yet, it knows how to keep itself within the limits prescribed by the nature of the work, or by the condition of him who undertakes it; it takes care not to engage inconsiderately in disproportionate enterprises. With courage; for St. Paul exhorts us ‘not to be weary in well-doing,’² a disposition which would, at once, evince a want of zeal and faith. With perseverance; for we often see weak, light, and inconstant persons, who are easily disconcerted in their good purposes, who, to use a comparison from scripture, ‘put their hands to the plough, and look back.’³

Occasions to do good, are found every where; but the will to undertake it, is what we want. In the obscurity of a retired life, where we have little or no communication with the world, we shall find many opportunities of edifying our neighbor, and glorifying God. It is true, we should always act with precaution; work at the salvation of others, in such a manner as not to endanger our own; consult and promote their spiritual improvement, so as not to neglect the care of our perfection. Yet, we should not confine our zeal to ourselves; and when God vouchsafes to make use of us to promote the interests of his glory, it would be injurious to his goodness to apprehend that he will forget us.

III. We must suffer—Yes, we must suffer, not only to submit to Providence, atone for our sins, and sanctify ourselves by the virtue of the cross; but also for the success of the works of God, in which we may have to take a part.

1 Eph. ii. 14.

2 2 Thes. iii. 13.

3 Luke ix. 62.

The apostles, according to the testimony of the holy scriptures, were men who exposed themselves to all kinds of persecutions, outrages, and torments, to preach the gospel.¹ The vilest motives prompted others to preach it too;—‘some out of envy,’ says St. Paul, ‘some out of contention, not sincerely, imagining that they raise affliction to my bonds;—but what then?’ he adds, ‘so that every way, whether by occasion, or by truth, Christ be preached; in this also I rejoice, yea, and I will rejoice.’²

Such ought to be our disposition with regard to those designs of which God has made us the instruments. When, to ensure their success, there is nothing necessary but to suffer, let us suffer with joy—thinking ourselves happy that God, uniting his cause with ours, and wishing us to suffer for his glory, will feel interested, for the sake of the same glory, to console us, and wipe off our tears.

Whoever wishes to serve God must expect to suffer. ‘All who will live piously in Christ Jesus,’ says St. Paul, ‘shall suffer persecution.’³ And the wise man had said, long before: ‘Son! when thou comest to the service of God, prepare thy soul for temptation.’⁴

We must arm ourselves with courage, and patience. We shall suffer tribulations and meet with difficulties, which will shake our best resolutions, if our faith and charity are not strong and firm; the world will blame us, tempt us, and endeavor to deprive us of the tranquillity and happiness we enjoy in the practice of religion; our friends and enemies will seem to conspire in opposing our pious designs. Even those friends who unite with us in the pursuit of good works, and from whom we should expect help and encouragement, will often, through diversity of humor and temperament, different views and contrary habits, become a source of new temptation to us.

1 Acts xv. 26.—2 Cor. iv. 11.—1 Thess. ii. 8.
2 Philip. i. 15—18.

3 2 Tim. iii. 12.
4 Eccl. ii. 1.

Thus, unless our patience be great, our charity universal, and our piety fervent, we shall feel the yoke of the Lord. 'Light and sweet' as it is to those who take it upon themselves with courage and alacrity, it will lie heavy upon us, and we shall sink under its weight.

CHAPTER XV.

ON FRATERNAL CHARITY.

SECTION I.

The nature and necessity of fraternal charity.

‘THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind—this is the greatest, and first commandment. The second is like to this:—thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’¹ Thus, the love of our neighbor, is placed almost on an equality with the love of God;—both are commanded alike, and the two commandments are said to be similar. Such is the goodness of God, remarks St. Chrysostom, that, notwithstanding the infinite difference which exists between him and man, he wishes the love we are to have for our fellow-beings, to be like to that which we ought to feel for him. Hence, that supernatural gift, which divines call the theological virtue of charity, enables us, at once, to love God above all things, on account of his infinite perfections; and our neighbor, as ourselves, for God’s sake.

The love of our neighbor, according to the doctrine of the beloved disciple, is, both,—a consequence of the love which God showed us, when ‘he so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son;’² and,—a proof of the love we have for him. ‘If God hath so loved us,’ he says, ‘we ought also to love one another;’³ and soon after, ‘He that loveth

1 Mat. xxii. 37. 38. 39.

2 John iii. 16.

3 1 John iv. 11.

not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not?'¹

To the first reasoning of St. John, some might object, that the natural consequence we should draw from the love of God for us, is, that we ought to love him, and not, that we should, of course, love our neighbor. St. John himself draws this first consequence, 'Let us, therefore, love God, because God first loved us,' he says in the same epistle;²—but the apostle, 'whom Jesus loved,' understood that the love of God and the love of our neighbor, are inseparable. The one can never subsist, without the other;—they are but one love of pure charity, which makes us love God for himself; and our neighbor, for God's sake. We can, therefore, neither love God without loving our neighbor, nor love our neighbor, with the love of pure charity, without loving God. The Christian's motive for loving his neighbor, is, to do the will of God. 'This command we have from God, that he who loveth God, love also his brother.'³

When he asserts that the love we have for our neighbor, is a proof of our love for God, he reasons thus: He who does not love his brother, whom he sees with his own eyes, will never make me believe that he loves God, whom he never saw. If he loves not the Creator in man, his image and visible likeness, how will he persuade me that he loves him in himself, in his invisible essence, and in the light inaccessible, which he inhabits? This reasoning is convincing, and dispels all illusions. For, who would dare say, I love thee, O God! provided that it will cost me nothing, that I shall not be obliged to govern my passions, to check my temper, to overcome my feelings and antipathies? my heart is thine, O Lord! yet, this heart, that belongs to thee, is insensible to the wants of some, rejoices at their misfortunes, and repines at the prosperity of others, for whose sake thy Son died upon a cross? I love thee, my God! and yet,

1 1 John iv. 20. 2 Chap. iv. 19. 3 1 John iv. 21.

cannot love what thou lovest, I cannot suffer what thou sufferest; I cannot live peaceably on this earth with certain persons, with whom I hope to possess thee in heaven?—Such language would be an insult to God.

The love of Jesus Christ for us, is to be the model of our love for our neighbor. 'I give you a new command,' he says, 'that you love one another, as I have loved you.'¹ He loved us purely for God, and he wishes us to love our neighbor purely for God. Behold here, says Saint Austin, the commandment he calls *new*; not only because he then issued a new ordinance, or, because he had lately taught it, by word as well as by example; but, because it is actually, a new mode of loving, which he requires of us. Natural love, which is founded upon flesh and blood,—the consideration of interest and pleasure,—is a very ancient love; it is as old as the world. But the love which Christ wishes us to have for our neighbor, is a *new* love; because it is to be spiritual, and supernatural, so as to prompt us to love our neighbor for God.

Our Lord attached so much importance to fraternal charity, that he made it the distinctive mark of his disciples: 'By this,' he said, 'shall men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.'² In his discourse, after the last supper, he commands it, in the strongest terms: 'This is my command, that you love one another, as I have loved you;'³ and again, 'These things I command you, that you love one another.'⁴

In that sublime prayer, which he addressed to his heavenly Father in behalf of his disciples, on the eve of his passion, Jesus Christ goes so far, remarks St. Chrysostom, as to give union and brotherly love among his followers, as a proof of his divine mission: 'I pray,' he says, 'that they all may be one, as thou, Father! in me, and I in thee,—that

1 John iii. 34.

2 John xiii. 35.

3 John xv. 12.

4 John xv. 17.

the world may believe that thou has sent me.’¹ Nor was this proof ineffectual. Out of the many instances of its efficacy, which might be adduced, I shall select a striking one, related by Baronius. St. Pacomius being yet a pagan, and engaged in the service of Constantine the Great, embarked with new levies, that were sent against Maxentius: they arrived in great distress in a town, whose inhabitants generously provided for all their wants. The young soldier, struck with admiration and astonishment at the conduct of those charitable strangers, anxiously inquired who they were. Being informed that they were Christians, and that their religion taught them to be kind, and do good to all men, he, forthwith, resolved to embrace christianity, and, as soon as the war was ended, he received baptism.

From the prayer of Christ, which I have already cited, it may likewise be inferred, that he gave fraternal charity, as a mark of the love of God towards those who preserve it among themselves. For he prayed, too, that ‘those who should believe in him, might be made perfect in one,—that the world might know that his heavenly Father loved them.’ This mark is plainly assigned by St. John: ‘We know that we have passed from death to life; because we love the brethren.’² And again: ‘If we love one another, God abideth in us, and his charity is perfect in us.’³

Fraternal charity is essentially connected with the fundamental principles and leading doctrines of christianity. The beloved disciple, into whose heart it was transfused from the very bosom of his divine Master, scarcely speaks of any thing else in all his epistles.—Mark how strong his expressions are on this subject: ‘He that loveth his brother abideth in the light;—but he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth; because the darkness hath blinded his eyes.’⁴—

1 John xvii. 21. 2 1 John iii. 14. 3 1 John iv. 12. 4 1 John ii. 10. 11

‘Whoever hateth his brother, is a murderer;’¹—‘if any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.’² St. Jerom relates, that this great apostle, in his old age, when he was no longer able to deliver a regular discourse, used, every time he addressed the faithful, to say only these words, ‘My little children! love one another;’ and that, having been asked why he continually repeated the same thing, he answered; ‘Because it is the precept of our Lord, and if this alone be fulfilled, it is enough.’ St. Paul expressed the same sentiment, when he wrote to the Romans, ‘He that loveth his neighbor, hath fulfilled the law;’³ and, to the Galatians, ‘All the law is fulfilled in one sentence, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’⁴

The first Christians understood these great truths, and reduced them to practice: ‘The multitude of the believers had but one heart and one soul,’ says St. Luke. ‘Do you wish to know what sort of people the Christians are?—writes Tertullian—‘it will be easy to satisfy you; we are a nation of brethren; nature made us equal, grace unites us still more closely; we have the same Father, God; the same spirit, the love of God; amongst us, the poor are as welcome as the rich; we have no other ambition than to excel each other in virtue. We take great care not to hate, nor grieve, nor injure any one: for we are commanded to love all men, even our enemies; to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that persecute, and calumniate us. Amongst us, in fine, no one murmurs, no one seeks revenge, no one speaks ill of his brother.—Such is our doctrine, such is the gospel which is to judge us, on the last day.’

Without fraternal charity, all other christian virtues are useless and suspicious. Hence, St. Paul, after having recommended some of the most important among them to the Colossians, adds: ‘But above all these things, have charity,

which is the bond of perfection.’¹ As if he had said:—Be rigid and severe with yourselves; but, at the same time, be kind and indulgent to others; without fraternal charity, the greatest austerities are mere ostentation:—Be humble, but remember that charity is the inseparable companion of true humility; that in proportion as we become little in our own eyes, others rise in our estimation, and that the most humble, are always the most charitable:—Be religious, yet know, that ‘Religion pure and unspotted with God and the Father,’ consists, not only in ‘keeping one’s-self undefiled from this world, but also in visiting the fatherless and the widows in their tribulation:’²—Be pious, ‘Piety is profitable to all things;’ but forget not, that, if the first law of piety is to love God, the second, ‘which is like to the first, is, to love our neighbour:—in a word, have every virtue that can recommend the christian character; but above all things, have charity, which unites and perfects all virtues, and, without which, they are unprofitable in the sight of God, and suspicious to men. St. Peter, in his first epistle, says, in the same sense, ‘Before all things, have a mutual charity among yourselves.’³

Such being the nature, and necessity of fraternal charity, let us banish all the suggestions of self-love, pride, and wounded feelings, or, in the language of scripture, of ‘flesh and blood,’ by which we might be tempted to neglect the practice of so essential a virtæ. Let our charity extend to all; let us love our friends in God, and our enemies for God.

1 Col. iii. 14.

2 James i. 27.

3 1 Pet. iv. 8.

SECTION II.

The characteristics of fraternal charity.

‘THAT the members might be mutually careful one for another,’ says St. Paul, ‘if one member suffer any thing, all the members suffer with it.’¹ From this comparison, we may infer that one of the essential duties of fraternal charity is, to share in the grief, to partake in the afflictions, to feel for the misfortunes of our fellow-creatures,—‘To weep, with them that weep.’² The same apostle, who had become ‘all things to all men,’³ points out another, not less indispensable, when he says, ‘Rejoice with them that rejoice;’⁴ that is, be glad of the success and good fortune of others, and give thanks to God for the blessings, he bestows upon them.

But the charity which we ought to have for our neighbor, is not to be confined to the interior;—it should manifest itself exteriorly, in our actions. Even the infinite love of Christ for us, was attested by his sufferings, and his death: ‘In this we have known the charity of God,’ says St. John, ‘because he hath laid down his life for us.’⁵ Hence, this apostle, ‘whom Jesus loved,’ boldly asks:—‘He that shall see his brother in need, and shall shut up his bowels from him,—how doth the charity of God abide in him?’⁶—He then concludes: ‘Let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth.’⁷

St. Paul enumerates the characteristics of fraternal charity minutely, in the thirteenth chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians: ‘Charity,’ he says, ‘is patient, is kind;

1 1 Cor. xii. 25. 26.

2 Rom. xii. 15.

3 1 Cor. ix. 22.

4 Rom. xii. 15.

5 1 John iii. 16.

6 1 John iii. 17.

7 1 John iii. 18.

charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil, rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' Let us dwell upon some of them, that we may the better understand the nature and practice of this essential virtue.

'Charity is patient.'—Full of faults and imperfections as we are, and having to deal with persons equally imperfect, and, perhaps, less accustomed to govern their temper and control their passions, than ourselves, it would be impossible to preserve with them, that peace and union which religion commands and the good of society requires, without the constant practice of patience. By 'bearing one another's burdens,' with patience, 'we fulfil the law of Christ;'¹ but,—if we are not willing to suffer any thing from others,—if we give way to our temper and ill-humor, upon the slightest provocation,—how can we call ourselves the followers of him, 'who,—when he was reviled, did not revile,—when he suffered, threatened not?'² In vain should we try to exculpate ourselves, and throw the whole blame of our conduct upon others, by saying that they provoke us; for,—whether it be so or not,—whether they be in fault too, or not,—their faults do not authorize ours.

You will say that it is difficult, always to offer violence to ourselves; and repress our feelings;—so it is for corrupt nature; but charity renders it practicable, and even easy,—'It beareth all things, endureth all things.' Moreover, this difficulty will not last forever;—we shall have nothing to suffer in the next world. What we now bear with, will not be of long duration; and the reward we shall receive, will never end.

'Charity is kind.'—It is polite, obliging, condescending. Under its mild influence, we love 'to please our neighbor

1 Gal. vi. 2.

2 1 Pet. ii. 23.

for his good,'¹ and we are willing to yield to him, in all things, so far as the law of God permits. It softens and polishes manners, naturally harsh and uncouth; and enables us to act towards our neighbor, according to the rules of the most refined politeness, without any mixture of interest and self-love. It prompts us to discharge towards our fellow-beings, all the duties that a similarity of nature, and the will of God, 'who gave to every one commandment concerning his neighbor,'² lay upon us. In our intercourse with them, it regulates the tone of our voice, the choice of our expressions, and the manner of our address, so as to gain their good will, and win their hearts. 'A sweet word multiplieth friends, and appeaseth enemies;³ and 'a man wise in words, shall make himself beloved.'⁴ 'Let nothing be done through strife, nor by vain glory,' says St. Paul; 'but, in humility, let each esteem others better than themselves, each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's'⁵—'in honor preventing one another.'⁶

Saint Basil gives excellent advice to those, who, either by duty, or by their own choice, are engaged in works of mercy, and external charity: Take care, says he, that to hard labor of the body, you unite great sweetness of words. It is not enough that we take much pains in what we are doing for others, we should also do it with a good grace, and in an obliging manner. It is thus, true charity acts: and her good offices are, thereby, always acceptable and pleasing. 'My son,' says Ecclesiasticus, 'in thy good deeds, make no complaint; and when thou givest any thing, add not grief, by an evil word. Shall not the dew assuage the heat? so also the good word is better than the gift.'⁷ So

1 Rom. xv. 2.

4 Eccl. xx. 13.

6 Rom. xii. 10.

2 Eccl. xvii. 12.

5 Philip ii. 3. 4.

7 Eccl. xviii. 15. 16.

3 Eccl. vi. 5.

much depends on the manner in which services are rendered, that if there be any thing faulty in it, they often lose all their merit, and sometimes become even offensive. When it is not in our power to grant the favor, which may be asked of us, we should take great care to show, that it is not the want of good will, but impossibility, which makes us refuse it. Let good words, in such cases, supply the want of good deeds; so that our neighbor may have no reason to doubt our inclination to serve him, and be induced to be thankful, at least for the kindness and good feeling, we evince towards him.

‘Charity envieth not.’—The reason is obvious. When we love our neighbor as ourselves, we rejoice at his excellence and prosperity, as we would at our own: far from envying his happiness, we wish to see it increase; we take a real interest in every thing in which he is concerned, and that interest is the same which he takes himself. What can be more contrary to charity, than to grieve at the success and felicity of our fellow-man, and to feel pain even at the thought of his virtues? Yet this is the character of envy:—a wretched passion;—the disease of little minds;—a tacit avowal of our own inferiority to those, by whom we are eclipsed, and at whose side we, perhaps, dwindle into comparative insignificance.

‘Charity dealeth not perversely.’—It causes us carefully to watch over ourselves lest we should say any thing, that might either offend, or displease others. Nor is it difficult to know what may have that effect:—we can learn it from ourselves. It is the rule given us by the Holy Ghost in Ecclesiasticus:—‘Judge of the disposition of thy neighbor by thyself.’¹ Interrogate your own heart;—see what would hurt your feelings, wound your pride, or excite your displeasure,—and be sure, that, from the same cause, a similar result is to be expected with regard to others. And do not

imagine, because some persons are of a mild and forbearing disposition, that there is no need of being so particular, when we speak with them. For charity does not require of us to consider merely, whether others are likely to bear with what we may choose to say; but also, whether our language is not naturally calculated to offend and provoke them.—Humility would be the surest preservative against the faults of which I speak. A person who thinks little of himself, who distrusts his judgment and is conscious of his own imperfections, is not apt to be harsh, vexatious, or sarcastic towards his neighbor.

‘Charity is not puffed up.’—A Christian, who is taught to see, in every man, a brother and a friend, whom he is to love as himself, should, in his intercourse with his fellow-beings, lay aside all claims to distinction and pre-eminence. This would be the natural effect of true friendship, which, as moralists remark, knows not what pride is, and either finds, or makes men equal. Thus, the love which the Son of God had for us prompted him ‘to be made to the likeness of men;’¹ they were no longer called ‘his servants,’ but ‘his friends,’² and ‘his brethren;’³ he came ‘not to be ministered unto, but to minister;’⁴ he was in the midst of them, ‘as he who serveth;’⁵ and ‘it behoved him,’ says St. Paul, ‘in all things to be made like to his brethren.’⁶

‘Charity thinketh no evil.’—This is the most lovely feature of fraternal charity, though perhaps the least observable in the conduct of many, whose lives are otherwise pious and edifying. ‘Of all the reproaches which a malignant and censorious world lavishes indiscriminately on the professors of religion,’ says Massillon, ‘that of being apt to see evil where there is none, is not the most unjust. Some deluded devotees have no mercy on their fellow-beings; every thing, in others, appears criminal in the eyes of their false zeal:

1 Philip. ii. 7.

3 John xx. 17.

5 Luke xxii. 27.

2 John xv. 15.

4 Mat. xx. 28.

6 Heb. ii. 17.

they suppose them guilty of sin, without proof; they ascribe to malice and depravity, faults, which natural weakness and the violence of temptation, often extenuate in the sight of God,—as if the air and language of piety which they assume, could justify the rashness of their suspicions, and authorize the violation of the rules of charity. They consider it a merit, to be more clear sighted than others, with regard to the faults of their neighbor. Charity covers every thing, and scarcely perceives the evil, which every one else sees; and they wish to see alone, that, which is invisible to others. Charity covers what it cannot excuse; and they do not excuse even that, which appearances justify, or render, at least, uncertain. Such persons seem to imagine that they glorify God by thinking their brethren weaker, and more imperfect, than they appear; and their pride is gratified, when they can discover any thing in their conduct, that may confirm their suspicions. Nothing resembles charity less, than this ‘evil eye,’ which opens only to view the faults of others. Simple, and a stranger herself to dissimulation, charity does not distrust the appearances of piety; nor does she suspect of hypocrisy a person in whose conduct virtue alone is seen. She is not on her guard against the error, which makes us judge too favorably of our neighbor;—it is a pious error, which does honor to religion;—she fears only the rashness, which suspects evil, where it is not; because, it is a disgrace to piety, which renders virtue odious, and authorizes the censure of the world against religion.’

SECTION III.

Faults against charity—injurious tales, and evil reports.

THERE are persons who when they know any thing injurious to another, are not satisfied until they have told it to some one else; some even seem to make it their business,

to inform every body of what they have heard to the detriment of their neighbor, and to have nothing else to do, than to carry idle tales and circulate evil reports. Such conduct, according to the inspired writers, is detestable in the sight of God, and an object of abhorrence to men. 'There are six things that the Lord hateth,' says the author of the book of proverbs, 'and the seventh his soul detesteth—him that soweth discord among brethren.'¹ 'The tale-bearer,' adds the son of Sirach, 'shall defile his own soul, and shall be detested by all.'²

Every one acknowledges these truths; but few are willing to think themselves concerned in them. They fancy that the hateful character of the tale-bearer, is to be borne by him alone, who speaks of the faults of others through ill-will, and to injure them; and upon this false supposition, they imagine that they keep within the bounds of charity, whilst they make the conduct of their neighbor an ordinary subject of animadversion, in their intercourse with their friends and intimate acquaintances. But they are greatly mistaken. In regard to charity, not less than justice, the injury is independent of the intention with which it is done. He who steals my property, whether he intends to make me suffer by it, or merely to gratify his covetousness, commits a sin, and is bound to restitution; for the loss I sustain, is the same in both cases. So, in like manner, if we lessen a person's character in the estimation of another through levity and indiscretion, we are obliged to repair the injury thus done to him, not less than if it had been done intentionally.

St. James assures us that 'if any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue,—this man's religion is vain.'³ But, to whom does he allude?—is it to those who are addicted to cursing, blaspheming, and obscene words? no;—for profane talkers and lewd jesters, do not 'think

1 Prov. vi. 16. 19.

2 Eccl. xxi. 31.

3 James i. 26.

themselves to be religious.'—Is it to the slanderer and calumniator? no;—for the same reason. Whom, then, can he mean? None but those, who, relying upon certain acts of external piety which they perform, 'think themselves to be religious,' whilst they violate the rules of charity by spreading idle tales and injurious reports about their neighbor; who, instead of being silent on his faults, when duty does not compel them to speak, make them known, through pride, envy, jealousy, or ill-nature, if not ill-will; who, sometimes, 'deceive their own hearts,' so far as to imagine that 'they do a service to God,'¹ when they cause a fellow-being to lose the love and esteem of his most intimate friends, and 'kill him' as it were, spiritually, by destroying his character in the estimation of many. Their tongues are 'a restless evil, full of deadly poison,'² and 'the venom of asps is under their lips.'³

Another sort of tale-bearing, which I shall briefly notice in this place, is, to tell others what has been said against them, and mention the names of those who said it. A person will let fall a word rather equivocal, and which may seem to convey an unfavorable opinion of the talents, disposition, or character of another,—we, forthwith, go and inconsiderately tell it over to him;—perhaps, we imagine that we have done no harm; but we have hurt his feelings, and indisposed him towards that person. It would be difficult to say what will be the consequences of our imprudence—they may be fatal. 'The words of a tale-bearer are, as it were, simple; but they reach to the innermost parts of the heart.'⁴ Sometimes a mere trifle, the least thing in the world, will have that unhappy effect. We should therefore be careful to examine not only whether what we repeat is important or not, in itself, but likewise, whether it be not calculated to give pain to the person to whom we

1 John xvi. 2.

2 James iii. 8.

3 Ps. cxxxix. 4.

4 Prov. xxvi. 22.

tell it, and cause a misunderstanding, between him and the one who said it.

There are faults against charity of which some persons seem to make no account whatever: I know not in what light they view them, or if they regard them at all; but, to those who examine them properly, they appear to be of such importance, that considering their evil tendency and bad effects, they have just cause to fear lest they often amount to mortal sin.—The idle tales, and injurious reports of which I speak, are of this description: from them arise suspicions, rash judgments, and detractions;—nay, calumny, hatred, and cruel revenge, can often be traced to the same source. But—some one will observe—it is sometimes proper that our neighbor should know what is said against him, in order that he may be more cautious, and, either avoid doing what gives others a just cause of complaint, or vindicate his character from malicious aspersions and wanton attacks.—This is very true; but we ought to content ourselves, in such cases, with telling what we have heard, without naming any one, even if the thing had been said publicly, and were, of course, likely to be repeated by others. Let not false notions of friendship, or zeal for the reputation of our neighbor, ever make us transgress this rule, which prudence and charity prescribe. Let us, above all, take care that we are not induced to do so, by ill-will, envy, or jealousy towards the persons concerned.

St. Austin gives great praise to his mother, St. Monica, because, certain persons, who were at variance among themselves, having come separately to complain to her, with great bitterness, of one another, she never told any of them what the others had said against them; but repeated only what she thought might soothe their feelings, and contribute to their reconciliation. We ought to imitate her conduct.—‘Blessed are the peace-makers; for they shall be

called the children of God.'¹ But, 'wo to that man, by whom the scandal cometh.'²

SECTION IV.

The subject continued—offensive railleries, warm contentions, ill-timed reprimands, recriminations, desire of revenge, resentment, and prejudices.

SARCASTIC remarks on the character, manners, or peculiarities of others, are altogether contrary to christian charity. Much wit may be displayed in them; but they generally denote, either a bad heart, or a little mind.—The wittier they are, the deeper the wound they inflict, and more lasting the evil they cause. If we are to be brought to an account, on the day of judgment, for every 'idle word,' we shall have said,—how much more liable shall we not be to the scrutiny of divine justice, for malicious jokes and offensive railleries, calculated to destroy good feelings, and provoke resentment! St. Paul places 'foolish talking,' and 'scurrility' among the things which are not even to be named by Christians.³

Let us also carefully avoid dispute and contestation. 'Contend not in words, for it is to no profit, but to the subversion of the hearers.—The servant of the Lord must not wrangle, but be gentle towards all men.'⁴ St. Dorotheus says, that he had rather things should be left undone, than perceive any disputes or contests arise amongst brethren in doing them. St. Bonaventure affirms, that there is nothing more unbecoming God's servants, than to be at variance, and contend with one another. And St. John Climachus assures us, that obstinacy, even in the cause of truth, can come from none but the devil. And indeed, what often prompts us to

maintain our opinion, with warmth and acrimony, is the desire we have to be thought wiser than our opponents; rather than the interest we take in the subject of the dispute. The love of truth, is what we pretend, and perhaps, fancy, to be the cause of our inflexibility, whilst we are really urged on, by pride and vanity. Moreover, the subjects of most disputes and altercations, in the ordinary occurrences of life, are generally so trifling and insignificant, that it ought to appear a matter of no importance to the contending parties, which of the two is mistaken. There are persons, however, who, as if they were answerable for every erroneous opinion, which another may happen to express in their presence, are always sure to contradict it, without any regard to his feelings. Such conduct may proceed from a false zeal, which ought to be enlightened, and regulated; but, most commonly, it originates in pride, and always denotes presumption. It is by no means necessary, that, on all occasions, we should maintain our opinions, and endeavor to make others adopt them. When a person disagrees with us upon subjects of little, or no importance, we may give him our reasons for thinking as we do; but after that, let us drop the conversation, as if we had nothing else to say, and take care not to show, that, though we yield through politeness and for the sake of peace, we still think ourselves in the right. 'It is an honor for a man,' says Solomon in the book of proverbs, 'to separate himself from quarrels;'¹ and there is certainly, on many occasions, a great deal of merit in yielding to another, and letting him apparently, obtain the victory over us. For thus we practise humility, by overcoming the desire we generally have to make our own sentiment prevail; charity towards our neighbor, by not provoking him; and, the love of God, by removing the cause of many sins, which are usually committed in the heat of dispute. 'A hasty con-

tention kindleth a fire; and a hasty quarrel sheddeth blood.¹

Reprimanding, either without due authority, or proper moderation, is also a great fault against fraternal charity. We ought never to assume the right of reprimanding persons, who are not, in any manner, under our charge; for, generally speaking, such persons are unwilling to give us that right: and if we take it, they will think that we meddle with what does not concern us, and that we are either influenced by interested motives, or carried away by an immoderate zeal and a restless disposition. When we have good reason to suppose that our neighbor will take in good part, what we might have to remark on his conduct, we may then, admonish and try to correct him of his faults. But even in this case, we should wait for a favorable opportunity, and proceed with great caution and mildness. Ill-timed, and unwarrantable animadversions upon the conduct of others, are calculated to give rise to warm altercations, bitter repartees, and endless retaliations. We read that Socrates, dining one day with his friends, reprehended one of the guests, rather too severely: Plato, who was present, said to him—Would it not have been better for you, to defer this reproof to another time, and tell him of his fault privately?—Be it so, replied Socrates, but would you not, yourself, have done much better, if you had not told me of mine publicly? The altercation, between the philosopher and his disciple ended here; but among men of less prudence and wisdom, it would probably have gone much further. For when two persons once begin to recriminate, it is difficult to tell when they will stop; and they generally do not, before charity has been wounded, and scandal given to those who happen to be present. On such occasions, we blame with anger, and correct without moderation; because our self-love cannot forgive the self-love of others;—it hides our defects, and magnifies theirs.

However careful we may be, we shall often be liable, in our intercourse with our fellow-beings, to have our feelings wounded, and to wound theirs ; to give, and to take offence ; to cause, and receive displeasure. It will not, therefore, be amiss to remark how we should behave ourselves on these occasions.

When any one speaks to us in a rude and unbecoming manner, we must take care not to answer him in the same tone ; but bear his language with patience, and overlook it through humility. When two hard bodies hit one another, they make a great noise ; but if a hard body strikes against a soft one, it makes none at all. A cannon ball beats down a tower, with a terrible crash ; but if it be shot against a wool-sack, its force is deadened, and quickly spent. I have already remarked, in the words of Solomon, that ‘A mild answer breaketh wrath ; but a harsh word stirreth up fury.’¹ And the son of Sirach admonishes us, ‘to strive not with a man full of tongue, and heap not wood upon his fire.’²

The precise mode of answering those who provoke us by harsh language, unbecoming reproofs, or unfounded reproaches, cannot easily be prescribed : it must be determined,—according to the peculiarities of the circumstances of persons, places, and time,—by the rules of charity, tempered with prudence and humility. We read that Saint Dorotheus, on such occasions, used to say: ‘Dear brother ! pardon me, and pray for me.’ And, doubtless, this would be an efficient means of preventing disputes, and shortly settling matters.

But if unmindful of these wise rules, we should ever give way, at first, to the impetuosity of our temper, so as to recriminate, and begin a dispute ; we ought, immediately to recollect ourselves ; and by a proper apology, and even by asking pardon, endeavor to bring about a speedy reconciliation ; lest, against the precept of Saint Paul, ‘the sun should

1 Prov. xv. 1.

2 Eccl. viii. 4.

go down upon our anger.’¹ Nothing but humility, says St. Bernard, can repair a breach of charity.

When any one has offended us, or given us any cause of being displeased with him, we ought to guard against giving way to a desire of revenge. Enough of harm has already been done; let us not be the occasion of more. ‘Render to no man evil for evil.’² Nor do I mean, when I speak of revenge, that cruel passion, which rejoices in the sufferings of others, and is always bent upon doing injury: the enormity of the sin is sufficient, in this case, to deter any one, who is not lost to every sense of religion, and humanity. I allude to a certain vindictive disposition, in which, our pride and self-love see either no great sin, or no sin at all. One will say: I wish that person no harm; but I should be glad to find an opportunity to show him, and make him feel the impropriety of his behaviour to me. Another will rejoice at some censure, which the person with whom he had a falling out, may receive from others. A third, will feel a secret satisfaction at the disappointment, or slight injury, experienced by those who have incurred his displeasure. Now, all this is contrary to charity, and may be deservedly called revenge. Whoever cherishes such sentiments as these, has not forgiven his neighbor from his heart; and ought to have a scruple, when he says to God: ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.’ Therefore, when any one has offended you, ‘Say not, I will do to him, as he hath done to me;’³ I will treat him as he has treated me; for this proceeds from pride, and a desire of being revenged.

There are persons, who, upon pretence that they feel no hatred towards those who have offended them, do not take the proper means to bring about a true reconciliation; who refuse to see those with whom they once were intimate, and to speak with their former acquaintances. How different is

1 Eph. iv. 26.

2 Rom. xii. 17.

3 Prov. xxiv. 29.

this mode of acting, from the line of conduct prescribed by Saint Paul to the Ephesians! 'Let all bitterness,' he says, 'and anger, and indignation, be taken away from you, with all malice;—be ye kind, one to another, merciful, forgiving one another, even as God hath forgiven you in Christ.'¹ That is to say, forgive all from the bottom of your heart; for it is thus, that God forgives us, when we sincerely repent, and are truly converted. He is no longer angry with us, and treats us as he did before; he is as good to us as if we had never offended him; and, far from reproaching us with our past transgressions, he even forgets them.—'And their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.'²—'He will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea.'³ It is after this manner, we ought to forgive. If we do not, let us fear the punishment of the unmerciful servant, whom his master delivered up to the executioners; for, 'So also shall my heavenly Father do to you,' says our Lord, 'if you forgive not, every one his brother, from your hearts.'⁴ 'Forgive, and you shall be forgiven;—for with the same measure that you shall measure, it shall be measured to you again.'⁵

Let us also, with the utmost care, avoid entertaining prejudices against any one. There are persons of a suspicious disposition, who find fault with every thing; who labor under a kind of morbid feeling, which lets them enjoy no peace with themselves, or others, and which is not less destructive of their own personal happiness, than of fraternal charity. To overcome this evil disposition, and escape the temptations into which it naturally leads, we should, in the first place, acknowledge and deplore it; and, afterwards, use all our endeavors, not to suffer it to have the least influence on our conduct towards our neighbor.—Whatever may be our feelings, let us accustom ourselves to act according to our duty; and treat every one, as he has a right to be treated.

1 Eph. iv. 31. 32.

3 Mich. vii. 19.

5 Luke vi. 37. 38.

2 Heb. x. 17.

4 Mat. xviii. 35.

Others ought not to suffer and be molested, because we are angry, ill-disposed, or prejudiced against them. On the contrary, when we are displeased with any one, and feel a kind of aversion to him, we should be more particular in watching over ourselves, lest we should say something to him, that might give him offence, and show resentment. If, according to the command given us in the gospel, we ought to ‘do good to them that hate us,’¹ how much more are we obliged to be indulgent and kind to those who have incurred our displeasure, by our fault, perhaps, as much as by their own! who have offended us through human frailty, rather than malice, and ill-will! But, however this may be, and whatever may have been the motives of the conduct of our neighbor towards us, let us follow the advice of St. Paul,—‘If it be possible,’ he says, ‘as much as it is in you, have peace with all men.’²—‘Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.’³

SECTION V.

The subject continued—Rash judgments, and uncharitable suspicions.

‘WHY dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou despise thy brother?’⁴ Of all the means that the enemy of our salvation uses, to disturb the peace and happiness of society, one of the most efficacious, is rash judgment.—Even uncharitable suspicions, ought to be carefully avoided, if we are desirous to be upon good terms with our fellow-beings. For St. Austin calls them, ‘the poison of friendship;’ and St. Bonaventure, ‘a secret, but most dangerous evil, that drives God from us, and tears in pieces fraternal charity.’

1 Luke vi. 27.

2 Rom. xii. 18.

3 Rom. xii. 21.

4 Rom. xiv. 10.

Rash judgments are contrary to fraternal charity, by lessening, and sometimes destroying, without a sufficient cause, the good opinion we had of our neighbor. They render us guilty of injustice towards him; for he has a right to our esteem and regard, until he proves himself unworthy of them. We may form an idea of the nature of rash judgments, by considering what a sin it would be to blacken the character of another, and cause him to lose the esteem of his friends. For we do our friends the same injury, when, without a sufficient cause, we conceive a bad opinion of them, and deprive them of our love and esteem. We may also understand the injury we do to our neighbor, by judging him rashly, if we examine our own feelings, when others entertain a bad opinion of us, without our having given them a sufficient cause for it. To judge of our neighbor from ourselves, is the rule which charity and justice prescribe.

Persons of a timorous conscience must however observe, that there is a vast difference between being tempted to judge rashly, and yielding to the temptation, when it presents itself. It is not the temptation, but the consent we give to it, that constitutes the offence. It would undoubtedly be much better, not to be liable to have uncharitable thoughts about our neighbor; yet, after all, says Saint Bernard, a thought does not render us guilty, so long as we give no consent to it.

Three things, says Saint Thomas, are requisite, to judge lawfully—authority, knowledge, and integrity: authority, to be allowed to judge; knowledge, to know how to judge; integrity, not to be biassed. Now, in rash judgment, these three conditions are wanting. That knowledge is wanting, and that, of course, we must be prompted by some improper motive or other, is evident, from their being rash; nor could authority, if it existed, be lawfully exercised, under such circumstances. But it does not exist: he who judges his neighbor, usurps the authority of God, encroaches upon his

rights, and assumes a power that he has reserved to himself. 'Who art thou,' says St. Paul, 'that judgest another's servant?'—whether he acts right or wrong, it is not ours to investigate—to his own master, he standeth, or falleth.¹ That is to say, according to the explanation of St. Chrysostom: Why do you judge of what does not concern you; and go beyond the limits, within which, divine Providence and your situation, confine your jurisdiction? Is that person, whom you censure and condemn, any ways accountable to you? Have you any right, or superiority over him? Are you answerable for his conduct? If it were so, I would be willing that you should examine into his conduct, and I would then teach you, with what charity and prudence, you should proceed in so delicate a matter. But if this be not the case, leave him in the hands of his natural judge; and respect the right which he has to be judged by none but God, or those, whom God has appointed to watch over him. If his action is not censurable, and you condemn him, you do him injustice; and if he is guilty of the fault for which you condemn him, you commit an injustice against God, by assuming a power which belongs to him alone. 'There is one lawgiver, and judge,' says Saint James, 'who is able to destroy and to deliver. But who art thou, who judgest thy neighbor.'²

But if it be a sin to judge and condemn others, upon suspicions, to which their conduct may give rise, how much more criminal would it be to do so, when their actions are upright, and leave no room for censure? It is, however, what some do, who, not being able to find fault with the conduct of their neighbor, misconstrue his motives, and question the purity of his intentions: who call firmness of principles, bigotry; charitable deeds, ostentation; the practice of religious duties, hypocrisy, &c. This, in the language of inspiration, is 'to become judges of unjust

1 Rom. xiv. 4.

2 James iv. 12.

thoughts ;'¹ and act the part of the envious man, who, 'like a soothsayer, thinketh that which he knoweth not.'²

To conclude, 'Judge not, and you shall not be judged ; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.'³ Judge not ; because your neighbor is not accountable to you ; but you are both amenable to the same tribunal : 'We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ—every one of us shall render an account for himself to God.'⁴ Judge not your neighbor ; because you do not know him sufficiently ; you do not see his intention, which perhaps justifies him ; and if his crime be manifest, you cannot know, whether he will not repent, or has not already repented for it. He fell, do you say ?—but, he may rise again, and 'there shall be joy before the angels of God upon his doing penance ;'⁵ if so, 'who shall lay any thing to the charge of the elect of God ?'⁶ He fell,—but he, may, by a true conversion, have been restored to the favor of his Maker ; and, 'if God is for him, who will dare be against him ?'⁷ Will you still insist, you can judge, at least, from his present conduct, that he will soon fall again ?—But he will not fall : 'he shall stand,' says St. Paul ; 'for God is able to make him stand.'⁸

Pride, which is 'the beginning of all sin,'⁹ is also the most fertile source of rash judgments. And, what is most deplorable, is, that those who think they have made greater advances in the way of perfection than others, are frequently tempted to censure. The good opinion they have of themselves, makes them look with contempt on the weakness of their neighbor, and they seem to have acquired a right to judge every body. The saints say, that charity is the companion of humility ;—he who is truly humble, has not his eyes open to the faults of his neighbor, but considers his own ; and,—finding so many things to deplore

1 St. James ii. 4.

2 Prov. xxiii. 7.

3 Luke vi 37.

4 Rom. xiv. 10. 12.

5 Luke xv. 10.

6 Rom. viii. 33.

7 Rom. viii. 31.

8 Rom. xiv. 4.

9 Eccl. x 15.

in himself,—he is not tempted to bestow his attention on the imperfections of others. The consideration of our own faults, and spiritual infirmities, would, therefore, be an excellent preservative against the temptation of rash judgment. When we cannot help perceiving the faults of your neighbor, we should not curiously investigate the nature and extent of his offence, but look to ourselves;—we ought to leave him to the judgment of his conscience, and examine our own. We shall often find ourselves guilty of the same transgressions, prone to the same evils, that we notice in him;—equally, and, perhaps, more liable to censure.

Rash judgments sometimes proceed, immediately, from the corruption of our heart,—judging of the disposition of others by our own,—we easily think them guilty of what we are apt to do ourselves. ‘A fool,’ says Ecclesiastes, ‘when he walketh in the way, whereas he himself is a fool, esteemeth all men fools.’¹ Objects seen through a colored glass, appear of the same color as the glass; so a wicked man judges others to be like himself. As he views their conduct through a defective medium, and in an unfavorable light, he puts a wrong construction on every thing they do. He supposes them to be led by the same motives that guide him; he bestows his intentions upon them; and thus, betrays the corruption of his heart. ‘Wherefore, thou art inexcusable, O man! whosoever thou art that judgest. For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou doest the same things which thou judgest.’² On the contrary, a virtuous man interprets the actions of others in the best manner he can;—if he cannot excuse the act, he excuses the intention. We read of St. Ignatius, that, when an action was so evidently bad that he could not excuse it upon any ground whatever, he suspended his judgment, and said to himself, in the language of scripture: ‘Judge not before the time;’³—‘man seeth those things that appear; the

¹ Chap. x. iii.

² Rom. ii. 1.

³ 1 Cor. iv. 5.

Lord beholdeth the heart;'¹—'who art thou, that judgest another's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.'²

To the causes of rash judgments, which I have already mentioned, St. Thomas adds envy, jealousy, or some secret aversion. For, we easily believe what is pleasing to us; and as we naturally feel a certain satisfaction in the faults of him who is the object of these passions, the consequence is, that we judge him without mercy, and condemn him unjustly, upon the least suspicion. The truth of this assertion will be rendered more striking, by being contrasted with the effects produced on our judgments by strong attachment. When we love a person dearly, we approve all he does; and far from magnifying his faults, if, at times, we cannot help perceiving them, we try all we can to extenuate, and excuse them. The same fault, accompanied with the same circumstances, we judge to be highly criminal, in those we dislike, and a pardonable imperfection, in those we love. And daily experience teaches us, that there are persons from whom we can take nothing in good part, whilst, at the same time, we bear with many things from others, without being in the least offended, or displeased. Hence this maxim of the wise man: 'Hatred stirreth up strifes, and charity covereth all sins.'³ So that we may say, with truth, that it is the want of charity, which makes us judge others rashly. This want of charity is also the cause why we are sometimes offended with many things in them, which are no fault at all. When we feel a dislike to a person, his air, his gesture, his conversation, and even his good qualities, are displeasing to us.

The enemy of our souls sometimes endeavors to make us lose the esteem we have for virtuous persons, and the benefit we derive from their good example, on account of mere trifles, and imperfections, from which the most holy are not always exempt in this world.—Why, 'a just man

1 1 Kings xvi. 7.

2 Rom. xiv. 4.

3 Prov. x. 12.

shall fall seven times, and shall rise again ;'¹ 'and if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us ;'²—should then, such faults, as do not deprive our neighbor of the grace and love of God, deprive him of our esteem and good will ? No ;—christian charity has stronger ties and a more solid foundation, than worldly friendship : it is founded upon God, and partakes of the stability of the love, which he himself has for us. If then, he, who is lord and master, is not angry with the conduct of our fellow-beings ; why are we, his servants, and their equals, displeased and offended ? Notwithstanding these imperfections, which irritate us against our neighbor, God loves him, and continues to bestow his favors upon him ; why shall we act differently ?—'If God hath so loved us,' says the beloved disciple, 'we ought also to love one another ;'³ and, doubtless, after the same manner.

Let us also observe, with Saint Gregory, that God sometimes refuses minor graces to those on whom he lavishes his choicest gifts. In the wise disposition of his adorable providence, he leaves them to contend with many foibles and weaknesses, that they may become more and more humble and vigilant, and thereby preserve the great favors, which they have received. Remember, adds the same saint, that he, in whom you remark such imperfections, may, nevertheless, be perfect ; and that you may be very imperfect, though you are free from them. This consideration will enable you to preserve humility with regard to yourself, charity towards your neighbor, and to avoid rash judgments.

1 Prov. xxiv. 16.

2 1 John i. 8.

3 1 John iv. 11.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD.

‘NOT as I will, but as thou wilt.’¹—The Son of God, as the holy fathers remark, came down from heaven, and put on human nature, for two reasons; to redeem us by his blood, and to teach us the way to bliss by his doctrine and by his example. If he was not truly God, says St. Leo, he could have brought no remedy to our evils; and if he was not truly man, he could have shown no example for our imitation. But being God and man, at the same time, he has done both;—he came, ‘that we might have life, and have it more abundantly;’²—he came ‘to instruct us, that renouncing impiety, and worldly desires, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in this world;’³—‘he left us an example, that we should follow his steps.’⁴

But, of all the instructions that our Lord Jesus Christ has given us, one of the most important is, to have an entire conformity to the will of God. This, he taught in the excellent form of prayer which he gave to his apostles,—‘Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven;’⁵—this, he taught by his own example: ‘I came down from heaven,’ he says, ‘not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.’⁶ Thus, notwithstanding the horror, which, as man, he experienced at the approach of his passion, he remained perfectly resigned to the will of his heavenly Father: ‘Yet,’ he exclaimed, ‘not my will, but thine be done.’⁷

1 Mat. xxvi. 39.

2 John x. 10.

3 Tit. ii. 12.

4 1 Pet. ii. 21.

5 Mat. vi. 10.

6 John vi. 38.

7 Luke xxvii. 43.

SECTION I.

Two principles concerning conformity to the will of God.

To treat the subject of conformity to the will of God thoroughly, and establish its practice upon a solid foundation, we must lay down two incontestable principles.

The first is, that our perfection consists in this conformity, and that the greater it is, the greater also will be our perfection. Because, the love of God is, unquestionably, the most perfect of all virtues, and, the more we love him, the more perfect we are; but, an entire conformity to the will of God, is evidently the strongest proof of our love for him; therefore, the more perfect the conformity of our will to that of God, the more perfect our love, and the greater our perfection.

The second principle, we ought to lay down, is, that nothing happens in this world, but by the order, or with the permission of God. 'Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God.'¹ 'The eyes of the Lord, in every place, behold the good and the evil.'² His providence extends to, and directs all things;—his wisdom 'reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly.'³ 'He changeth times and ages; taketh away kingdoms, and establisheth them.'⁴ 'Two sparrows are sold for a farthing,' says Jesus Christ, 'and not one of them falls to the ground, without your Father;—the very hairs of your head are all numbered.'⁵ Chance and fortune are words by which men express their ignorance of the cause of occurrences, for which they cannot account; but with regard to God, nothing happens, nothing is done, by chance. 'All things are naked, and open to his eyes.'⁶ 'Lots are cast into the lap; but they are disposed of by the Lord.'⁷

1 Eccl. xi. 14.

4 Dan. ii. 21.

6 Heb. iv. 13.

2 Prov. xv. 3.

5 Mat. x. 29. 30.

7 Prov. xvi. 33.

3 Wisd. viii. 1.

From these principles it follows, that we are strictly bound to submit, in all things, to the dispensations of Providence; not merely, as inanimate creatures do, by necessity, but by a free consent of our will;—that we ought not to look upon any thing, as the effect of chance; but, as the fulfilment of the will of God, who, by means of secondary causes, regulates and directs human events. Thus when Job heard the misfortunes that had befallen him, he exclaimed: ‘the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so it is done; blessed be the name of the Lord.’¹ He did not say, remarks Saint Austin, ‘the Lord gave, and Satan hath taken away;’ because he knew, that the evil spirit can do nothing without God’s permission.

SECTION II.

Advantages we derive from a perfect conformity to the will of God.

THE habit of conformity to the will of God produces that entire resignation, which the saints consider as the source, and necessary foundation of the peace of the soul. Man then, places himself in the hands of God, even as a piece of clay in the hands of the potter; he leaves it to Providence to do with him what it thinks fit; he has no will of his own, and views the glory of God in all things. All he wishes is, that the divine will should be done with regard to him. It was in consequence of the perfect conformity of his will to that of heaven, that David deserved to be called ‘a man according to God’s heart!’—‘I have found David, a man according to my own heart, who shall do all my wills.’²—‘Shall not my soul be subject to God?’³ exclaims this holy

¹ Job i. 21.

² 1 Kings xiii. 14.—Acts xiii. 22.

³ Ps. lxi. 2.

king,—‘Be thou, O my soul! subject to God;’¹—‘My heart is ready, O God! my heart is ready.’²

Entire conformity to the will of God is the best means of practising that mortification and self-denial, which are so strongly recommended in the gospel. It includes the entire oblation of ourselves. In other acts of mortification, we make the sacrifice of one thing only, of our pride, for instance, our sensuality, or some other particular passion; but, by perfect conformity to the will of God, we offer ourselves as a perpetual holocaust to him, that he may deal with us as he pleases,—we renounce ourselves,—we die to ourselves.

Conformity to the divine will, is also the surest, and, in reality, the only means to preserve that ‘justice, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,’³ which establish the kingdom of God in our souls, and constitute our happiness in this life. For, as there is no change or vicissitude in heaven, and the saints enjoy undisturbed beatitude, in the constant fruition of God; so those who have attained a perfect conformity to the divine will, never suffer themselves to be disturbed, or in the least disquieted, by the various occurrences and events of this life. They will what God wills, and as he wills it; therefore, do they rejoice when the will of God is done, whatever may be the result,—whether success or disappointment, health or sickness, life or death. Then it is, that these words of the wise man are truly verified, ‘whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad;’⁴ and, that, as St. Paul speaks, ‘to them that love God, all things work together unto good.’⁵ This holy conformity is the foundation of that ‘peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, and keepeth our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.’⁶ And in truth, what could disturb our peace of mind, and depress our heart, when we receive all

1 Ps. lxi. 6.

3 Rom. xiv. 17.

5 Rom. viii. 28.

2 Ps. lvi. 8.

4 Prov. xii. 21.

6 Phil. iv. 7.

things from one, 'who loveth our souls ;'¹ whose 'thoughts' towards us are 'thoughts of peace, and not of affliction ;'² whose 'judgments,' though 'incomprehensible,'³ 'are equity ;'⁴ who is 'just in all his ways, and holy in all his works ?'⁵ What could make us unhappy,—when we place our happiness in God,—when the accomplishment of his holy will is the sole object of all our wishes and desires ?

But if we make our happiness depend upon any of the perishable enjoyments of this life, it must needs be subject to their vicissitudes and instability. And, moreover, were these to last as long as we could wish, 'Our hearts, made for God, shall never be fully satisfied,' as St. Austin experienced, 'until they rest in him.' 'A covetous man shall not be satisfied with money,'⁶ says Ecclesiastes ; and the same must be said of all the good things of this world.

When St. Francis of Borgia arrived at Grenada with the corpse of the empress Isabella, the coffin in which it was enclosed had to be opened. The young duke was so struck at the awful change which he saw in the features of this once admired princess, that he made a firm resolution, at that very moment, to devote himself entirely to the service of God : 'I promise, O Lord !' he said within himself, 'never to serve a master, who is subject to death.'—Let us imitate this example ; let not our affections be riveted upon any thing that may be taken away from us against our will. Unless we do so, we need not expect ever to enjoy true peace and content of mind. I know, says St. Austin, that every one wishes to be happy ; but, unfortunately, all do not look for happiness where it is to be found. The covetous, the ambitious, the proud, the sensual,—all seek happiness ; but they seek it not, where they ought, and, of course they never find it. Let us not lose our time and weary ourselves in the pursuit of phantoms, which elude

1 Wisd. xi. 27.

3 Rom. xi. 33.

5 Ps. cxliv. 17.

2 Jerem. xxix. 11.

4 Ps. cxviii. 15.

6 Eccl. v. 9.

our grasp. Let us love, and seek that happiness, which alone is perfect and lasting; and rest assured, that 'all is vanity,' in this world, except to love God,—to serve him, and none but him.

St. Austin, writing upon these words of our Saviour, 'whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, that will I do,'¹ says, that we ought not to make our peace and tranquillity of mind consist in doing our own will, and obtaining what we wish,—for this is not, generally, what is best for us, and may often prove injurious and detrimental,—but, that we should endeavor to find our satisfaction in what God directs or permits. When our natural disposition would hinder us from good, and incline us to evil, we should pray to God, not that he would grant us what is evil, but that we should love what is good. In other words, if we find less satisfaction in the fulfilment of the will of God, than in doing our own, we ought to beg of God, not that ours be done, but that we should resign ourselves, with pleasure, to his. If, by the temptation of the devil, or our own corrupt nature, we should, at times, lose that relish for virtue and desire of perfection, which we once experienced,—if, like a sick person, we should be apt to wish what would be hurtful to us,—we must take care not to yield to the temptation; but earnestly beg of God to change our disposition, and 'to teach us to do his will,' with alacrity and joy.

Those who enter into a religious order are told, that they must never think of doing their own will, but be guided, in all things, by the will of their superiors. Yet, says St. Dorotheus, speaking on this subject, be not uneasy about this;—you may, if you choose, always do your own will. I shall show you how this can be accomplished, in perfect conformity to the rules of religious obedience. Have no other will, than that of your superior; and then in doing

his will, you will do your own. Thus, you will sleep as long as you please, because you will wish to sleep no longer than the rule permits; you will eat what you please, because you will not wish to eat any thing but what is before you; in a word, you will always do what you choose, because you will never choose, but what obedience directs. The application of this advice to a Christian, who wishes to serve God in the world, is obvious and easy. For he too has a superior to obey, and a rule to observe;—God is his superior, and the divine will is to be the rule of his conduct. Let him, therefore, have no other will than that of God, and he will do his own will in all things; for the will of God is always done: ‘Whatsoever the Lord pleased, he hath done,’ says the psalmist, ‘in heaven, in earth, in the sea, and in all the deeps.’¹ How happy we should be if such was the habitual disposition of our heart!

Perfect conformity to the divine will is one of the best dispositions to obtain the favors and blessings of heaven. For, it at once removes the attachment to our own will, which is the greatest obstacle to the Lord’s communications, and leaves us, entirely, to the direction of his kind and loving providence. Thus, when God wished St. Paul ‘to carry his name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel,’² the first sentiment, with which he inspired him, was an ardent desire to know and accomplish his will. This ‘vessel of election’ was yet prostrate on the ground, whence he saw ‘the heavenly vision,’ when, ‘trembling and astonished, he said, Lord! what wilt thou have me to do?’³—Oh short, but comprehensive prayer! exclaims St. Bernard, how fervent! how efficacious, and perfect! If then, you wish to have a sure and easy means to acquire perfection—here it is — Say with that apostle, ‘Lord! what will you have me to do?’ and with the prophet, ‘My heart is ready, O God! my heart is ready.’⁴ Let

1 Ps. cxxxiv. 6.

2 Acts ix. 15.

3 Acts ix. 6.

4 Ps. lvi. 8.

these words always be in your mouth, have them always in your heart; and the more familiar the sentiment they convey becomes to you, the greater will be your progress towards perfection.

The habit of conformity to the will of God furnishes us with a ready and most efficacious remedy, against a sort of temptation, by which the most pious are sometimes molested. The enemy of our soul endeavors to disturb the peace of their minds, by presenting to their imagination various temptations, to which they possibly might be exposed, and wishing them to answer what they would do, if they were actually to take place. Thus,—‘Were such a person (perhaps one of their best friends) to speak against you, or calumniate you,—what would you say?—how would you behave yourself under such, or such circumstances?’ The general rule given to persons who are subject to this kind of temptation, is, that they are not to answer these questions; because if they once begin to reply and argue, the same temptation will present itself under a variety of forms, and they will find it hardly possible to extricate themselves from the snares laid for them. Proper as this silence may be to defeat our enemy, and arrest the progress of the temptation, yet it may not produce those sentiments of confidence and piety, which alone can satisfy the mind, and warm the heart;—but conformity to the divine will, will have that happy effect. Let us say to ourselves on these trying occasions:—‘My sanctification is the will of God;’¹ ‘he will not suffer me to be tempted above that which I am able’² to stand, with the help of his grace. I place all my confidence in him;—if such misfortunes, or temptations were ever to befall me, I should endeavor to use every exertion in my power, not to offend him; and I firmly hope, that he would give me strength to do his ‘good, acceptable, and perfect will.’³

1 Thes. iv. 3.

2 1 Cor. x. 13.

3 Rom. xii. 2.

The combined efforts of men and the infernal spirits, can do us no harm, without the knowledge, and permission of God; and let us rest assured, that whatever may possibly take place, with his permission, is intended for our good. In hell, the damned suffer, and from their sufferings, they can derive no good to themselves—they are unavailable, and eternal. But on this earth, both sinners and the just, meet with crosses and afflictions, that they may, thereby, either be purified or improved, and, ultimately rewarded. ‘Let us believe that these scourges of the Lord, with which we are chastised,’ said Judith to the inhabitants of Bethulia, besieged by Holofernes, ‘have happened for our amendment, and not for our destruction.’¹ ‘According to the multitude of my sorrows,’ exclaimed holy David, ‘thy comforts have given joy to my soul.’² ‘Our present tribulation, which is momentary and light,’ writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, ‘worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.’³

Nor is it sufficient to have a speculative knowledge of this universal intervention of divine Providence in all that happens, we ought, moreover, in order to derive greater advantage from this truth, to believe it practically, so that it may produce in us a lively sense of resignation, and perfect conformity to the will of God. Thus, in the most trying occurrences, from what cause soever they may take place, we should say to ourselves:—‘God sees what I suffer; if he chose, he could prevent it; but he does not; he permits it; therefore, it must be for my own good; for he is a kind, merciful, and loving God. Under these circumstances, I must still work out my salvation. Viewed in themselves, they seem an obstacle to it; but in the designs of God, they are to be improved, with the assistance of his grace, into the very means, whereby it is to be obtained.’

1 Judith viii. 27.

2 Ps. ciii. 19.

3 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Such considerations soothe our griefs, alleviate our sorrows, banish fear, and cause us to rejoice in the midst of tribulations. 'O Lord! says the psalmist, 'thou hast crowned us with the shield of thy good will.'¹—And in fact, kind Providence surrounds, protects, and guards us on all sides. 'The Lord hath hidden me in his tabernacle,' says the same holy king; 'in the day of evils, he hath protected me in the secret place of his tabernacle;'² 'my soul trusteth in thee, and in the shadow of thy wings will I hope.'³ 'The children of men shall put their trust under the covert of thy wings;'⁴ 'thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy face.'⁵ The care of God's loving Providence is beautifully described by Moses, in his celebrated canticle, '*Hear, O ye heavens! the things that I speak,*' &c.—'The works of God are perfect,' he says, 'all his ways are judgment: he is faithful, he is just, and right. When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he appointed the bounds of people according to the number of the children of Israel. But the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, in a place of horror;—he led him about,—he kept him as the apple of his eye. As the eagle, enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, he spread his wings, and hath taken him, and carried him on his shoulders.'⁶

What comfort should we not derive in our afflictions, from this view of God's providence! If a man, wealthy, highly respected, and possessed of great power and influence in his country, had children and loved them dearly, would they not look to him, and rely upon his kindness and affection, in their wants and difficulties? With how much more reason should we cast our care upon our heavenly Father, whose love for us is as great, as his power, and his riches!

1 Ps. v. 13.

3 Ps. lvi. 2.

5 Ps. xxx. 21.

2 Ps. xxvi. 5.

4 Ps. xxxv. 8.

6 Deut. xxxii. 4. 8.—11.

No;—the love he has for us, in his Son, will never suffer him to cease to do good to us, for whose sake he delivered this beloved Son to the cruel death of the cross. It is the reflection of St. Paul: ‘He that spared not even his own Son,’ he says, ‘but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also, with him, given us all things?’¹

But, if all mankind, even the greatest sinners, are to have this confidence in God, that, in all the dispensations of his providence, he will be just, and kind, and merciful to them; how great and unbounded should be the confidence of those, who have devoted themselves, in a special manner, to his service!—who shun the dangerous pleasures and sinful enjoyments of the world—and whose only wish is, to please and love him, more and more, whom they have chosen as ‘their portion forever!’—It was this confidence that strengthened the saints among the many dangers, temptations, and persecutions, to which they were often exposed: nothing could disturb the peace and tranquillity of their mind; because they knew that nothing happened but with God’s permission, and for their own good.

SECTION III.

Three degrees of conformity to the will of God, with regard to sufferings.

THE masters of a spiritual life distinguish three degrees in the virtue of conformity to the divine will. Those who possess the first, would rather endure afflictions and misfortunes, than avoid them, by the commission of sin; although they shun them as much as possible, whenever they can do so in conscience. Those persons, though sensibly afflicted at the evils which they suffer, may still be said to be resigned

¹ Rom. viii. 32.

to the will of God. This degree is of strict obligation. The second, enables us to bear afflictions and crosses, with cheerfulness, whenever they come; under the conviction, that they befall us, by the permission of God, and for our own good. This degree is above the first, inasmuch as it causes us to suffer, not only with patience, for fear of offending God; but also with pleasure, for his sake. The third degree of conformity, makes us desire afflictions, before they come, and rejoice, when they are sent to us, as being the manifestation of the divine will towards us. The apostles had arrived at this perfect conformity, when, after having been cast into prison and scourged by the Jews, 'they went from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.'¹ So had St. Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians, 'I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy, in all our tribulation.'² Nor was this virtue peculiar to apostolical men;—it shone forth in the primitive Christians. 'You received with joy the plundering of your goods,' wrote St. Paul to the Hebrews, lately converted to the faith, 'knowing that you have a better and permanent substance.'³ And St. James exhorts all the faithful to this perfection: 'My brethren,' he says, 'count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations,'⁴ that is, into 'divers trials and afflictions,' as the context plainly shows. It is a common thing, says Father Avila, to thank God for favors and blessings; but it is peculiar to the just, to be grateful for afflictions and misfortunes.

Some persons, whilst they admit the principle, that we ought to suffer with patience, and that christian perfection requires us to suffer with joy, what God permits, are not, however, willing to apply it, as they should, to all particular cases, in which the will of providence is equally discernible. They seem to wish to conform to the will of God, on

1 Acts v. 41.

2 2 Cor. vii. 4.

3 Heb. x. 34.

4 James i. 2.

condition, that it shall be such as they could desire it.—Thus, for instance, they wish to be good, and lead a holy life; but they try to persuade themselves that they are not able to do so, under the circumstances in which they are placed, and wait until God grants them more favorable opportunities. That is to say, they wait for a change in the dispensations of Providence, that they may, when they are more conformable to their wishes, comply with them entirely. Such persons are willing to suffer, and do penance; but they would choose their sufferings. They would fast, for instance, but they will not practise humility; they could bear with sickness and poverty, but they cannot put up with an angry word, or a want of attention, which hurts their feelings. In short, they would do the will of God, if it were to agree with their own.

This disposition is far from the conformity of which I speak: it is a dangerous illusion, and palpable deception, by which our will and caprice are substituted in the place of the will of God, and of the counsels of his wisdom. The true servants of God, says St. Austin, are not anxious that he should command them, what they wish; but that they should wish, what he commands. Do not pray, says Abbot Nilus, that what thou wishest may take place; but pray, as thou hast been taught, that the will of God be done with regard to thee.

It does not belong to us to choose, what, and when, we should suffer; the choice must be left to God. You say—‘I know that I ought to suffer with patience, and, were my troubles and afflictions of a different nature, I would bear with them; but such as they are, and under the present circumstances, I cannot endure them.’—Why not?—I ask. Does God, who commands not things impossible, as St. Austin speaks, require you to put up with more, than you are able to stand? Does he—contrary to the testimony of St. Paul, who says he ‘will not’—suffer you to be tempted

above your strength? Moreover, were those things, which you would be willing to bear, left to your own choice, they could not be properly called sufferings. A sincere desire to please God, should prompt us to wish to follow the path, he points out, and not the road, which we may choose for ourselves. Let us say what we please;—our conformity to the will of God can never be such as it ought to be,—until we resign ourselves entirely into his hands, that he may deal with us as he pleases, at the time, and in the manner, he pleases,—until, at the sight of present evils or the apprehension of future misfortunes, we say with the prophet, ‘I have put my trust in thee, O Lord!’ thou art my God, my lots are in thy hands;¹ or with Heli, when Samuel foretold him the awful calamities which were soon to fall on his family, ‘It is the Lord, let him do what is good in his sight.’²

SECTION IV.

Conformity to the will of God, as regards our situation in life, and vocation.

EVERY one should be contented with that state of life, in which divine Providence has placed him, and never repine at its disposition. To endeavor, by lawful means, to better our situation, when it can be accomplished, without sin, or detriment to our piety, is not, generally speaking, contrary to the conformity we are bound to have to the will of God; but, even then, there may be a degree of anxiety and solicitude, incompatible with this virtue, and contrary to the precept of our Lord: ‘Be not solicitous for to-morrow, for the morrow will be solicitous for itself.’³ Saint Austin, commenting on this text from the psalms, ‘Incline my heart

1 Ps. xxx. 15.

2 1 Kings iii. 18.

3 Mat. vi. 34.

unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness,'¹ says that covetousness (meaning thereby all kinds of inordinate desires) is the source of all our evils.—What caused our first parents to fall from the state of innocence and happiness, in which they had been created, into sin and misery?—it was the desire of possessing more knowledge, and greater prerogatives, than had been granted to them.—Not satisfied with the exalted station he held in the mansions of bliss, Lucifer would 'ascend, and be like the Most-High,'—and 'he was brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit.'²

In a word, the consideration of the will of God should suffice to make us live happy and contented in the situation, in which we find ourselves unavoidably placed; but, if a change were possible, and should appear advisable, this holy will should be ascertained, before we could proceed with confidence and safety. For wo to the man, who, by a capricious determination, or a rash choice, deviates from the path, which divine Providence points out to him!

God made us, as we have been taught from our infancy, to serve him in this life, and to possess him in the next. In the meantime, his all-ruling providence must direct us in every circumstance of our mortal existence, and guide our steps in the various walks of life, through which his unerring wisdom may choose to lead us. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, remarks, that 'as in one body we have many members; but all the members have not the same office: so we being many, are one body in Christ, and each one, members one of another, having gifts different, according to the grace which is given us.'³ Now, as in the human body, each member is destined to a particular use; so, in the mystical body of Christ, every one of the faithful is to hold his station and employment, from the dispensation of Providence. It would, indeed, be a shocking deformity, if the eyes or the ears were to quit their natural position, with a

1 Ps. cxviii. 36.

2 Isaias xiv. 14. 15.

3 Rom. xii. 4. 5. 6.

view to perform the functions of the hands and feet. In like manner, when we desert the place assigned to us by the divine will, and intrude ourselves into situations to which we are not called, we disfigure the mystical body of Christ, by disturbing the order and harmony, which should arise from the fitness and adaptation of its members to the purposes, for which they were destined, and which cannot be effected, but by their entire dependence on him, 'from whom the whole body, compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase, unto the edifying of itself in charity.'¹

'The choice of a state of life,' says Massillon, 'is the only way to salvation, that the Lord has prepared for us. Whence it follows, that the advantages, which it may afford us to save our souls, are what we should principally consider in making it. In other words, among the various states of life, which we might embrace, that particular one ought to determine our choice, in which,—considering our natural disposition, our inclinations, and our weakness,—we shall find more means of salvation. Not that we should all go into solitary retirement—the silence and austerity of the cloister itself, is not the safest profession for all men. It is not the state of life, but the call of heaven, that constitutes safety. Thus, the sea swallowed up an unfaithful prophet, protected as he was by a strong ship and a skilful pilot, because he had embarked against the order of God, whilst it respected the footsteps of the chief of the apostles, and bore him up, when the Lord bade him walk upon its waves. Every thing is dangerous for him, who does not follow the call of the Lord; but danger itself becomes our safety, when he is our guide.'

1 Eph. iv. 16.

SECTION V.

Conformity to the will of God, in time of sickness, and public calamities.

As health is a gift of God, so is sickness a blessing which he sends us—to try and improve us, to make us feel our weakness, and know ourselves—to withdraw our affections from this world, and its fleeting joys—to check the impetuosity of our passions, by prostrating the strength of our earthly frame—to remind us that we are here in a land of exile, and that heaven is our true country—to afford us, in fine, innumerable other opportunities to obtain mercy, grace, and merit,—in this life,—happiness, and glory, in the next. ‘A grievous sickness maketh the soul sober.’¹—My son, said an ancient father of the desert to one of his disciples, do not grieve at your sickness, but on the contrary thank God for it; for it is a fire which scours you from rust, if you are iron; and purifies you, if you are gold. Ever since I have known the grace of Jesus my Lord, said Saint Clara, during her last and protracted illness, I found nothing bitter in sickness, nothing painful in sufferings, nothing difficult in the practice of penance.

But here some one might be apt to say: I would not care about being sick, if it were not that my business suffers, and my family are in need of my labor and daily exertions; another will complain, that he cannot attend to the duties of his profession, and even to the works of mercy and charity, which he performs, with great consolation to himself and benefit to his fellow-beings, when he is in good health; a third may allege some other inconvenience, arising from his sickness, as the cause of his anxiety and uneasiness. Saint Austin answers all these subterfuges of self-love, and self-

will, by laying down this incontestable principle, that it is more just that we should follow the will of God, than he ours, and that no man can regulate his actions by a better rule than he, who is more ready not to do what God forbids him, than anxious to accomplish what he undertakes of his own accord. Moreover, we are bound to conform to the will of God, such as it actually is, and not such as we could wish it to be; but, the illness of which we complain, on account of the trying circumstances with which it is attended, is precisely the effect of the will of God, and any other sickness, or the same, under different circumstances, would be the choice of our own; therefore, perfect conformity requires that we should bear it, with patience and resignation. Father Avila writing to a sick person, says, 'Do not think on what you would do if you enjoyed good health; but consider how much you will please God, if you only patiently bear your illness, and all its necessary consequences. If you truly seek to do the will of God, as I believe you do, what difference does it make, whether you be sick or well, since this divine will is equally accomplished in both cases?'

St. Chrysostom is of opinion that Job merited more, by the perfect submission with which he bore his misfortunes and sufferings, than by all the good works which he had performed, when he enjoyed health and prosperity;—for it was under the severest strokes of affliction he said: 'As it hath pleased the Lord, so it is done; blessed be the name of the Lord.'¹ We too, shall acquire greater merit, and please God more, by our entire conformity to his will, during our sickness, than by all we could do, if we were in perfect health.

St. Austin, speaking of the precept of fasting during the time of Lent, remarks, that it is enough for those, who, on account of ill-health, are not able to comply with this obli-

¹ Job i. 21.

gation, to regret and feel truly sorry that they are obliged to eat, whilst the rest of the faithful are keeping a strict fast.

There is more perfection, says St. Bonaventure, in bearing hard things and afflictions with patience, than in applying ourselves to good works with zeal and earnestness.

These great saints understood, that conformity to the will of God was one of the most essential of all christian virtues, and indispensably necessary in the hour of adversity and trouble; hence they strenuously recommend its practice to those who are tried in the crucible of afflictions. Nor is it merely with regard to ourselves and our own personal sufferings, that we ought to be resigned to the will of God; but we should preserve the same conformity to the dispensations of divine Providence, in times of general calamities—such as war, pestilence, famine, and other public scourges—viewing them as a visible manifestation of the ‘incomprehensible judgments’ of God, in perfect accordance with his mercy and love. We ought then, to adore, with profound humility, the ‘unsearchable ways’ of the almighty Ruler of the universe, and firmly believe, that, since all things are governed and regulated by his infinite wisdom, he would not permit these calamities to take place, if it were not that a greater good, than the evil which they cause, is to arise from them.

SECTION VI.

The remembrance of our sins should make us bear both public calamities and personal misfortunes, with patience and resignation.

It is the unanimous sentiment of the saints, that public calamities are, generally, permitted by almighty God in punishment of public prevarications; and this sentiment is

founded on the authority of scripture. 'Blessed art thou, O Lord! the God of our fathers,' exclaimed Azarias, in the furnace, 'thou art just in all thou hast done to us,—according to truth and judgment, thou hast brought all these things upon us for our sins. For we have sinned, and committed iniquity, departing from thee; and we have trespassed in all things. And we have not hearkened to thy commandments; nor have we observed nor done as thou hadst commanded us, that it might go well with us. Wherefore all that thou hast brought upon us, and every thing that thou hast done to us, thou hast done in true judgment.'¹ 'I beseech those that shall read this book, that they be not shocked at these calamities,' writes the author of the second book of Machabees; 'but that they consider the things that happened, not as being for the destruction, but for the correction of our nation. For it is a token of great goodness, when sinners are not suffered to go on in their ways, for a long time, but are presently punished. For, not as with other nations (whom the Lord patiently expecteth, that when the day of judgment shall come, he may punish them, in the fulness of their sins) doth he also deal with us, so as to suffer our sins to come to their height. He never withdraweth his mercy from us; but though he chastiseth his people with adversity, he forsaketh them not.'² Innumerable other passages show, that, as God chastised his people and delivered them into the hands of their enemies, on account of their sins, so he afterwards freed them from these evils, when they repented, and were sincerely converted to him. A similar dispensation of divine Providence is observable in numerous instances, relative to individuals, and personal sufferings. The words of Christ to the man whom he had cured at the pond of Bethesda, suffice to place this truth beyond the possibility of a doubt: 'Behold! thou art

1 Dan. iii. 26—31.

2 2 Mach. vi. 12—16.

made whole,' said he to him; 'sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.'¹

From this doctrine, it follows that one of the most efficacious means to induce us to be resigned to the will of God in afflictions, whether public or private, and to bear with them patiently, is, to remember our sins, and reflect on the punishment due to them; for this consideration will naturally lead us to confess, that what we have to suffer is less than what we deserve. And, in truth, if we properly attended to the malice and enormity of sin, we should soon understand, to use the language of Tertullian, that, 'to have sinned once, is enough to weep eternally.'—Instead of complaining of our sufferings, we would acknowledge with the penitent king, that the Lord 'hath not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.'² The true servants of God, not only bear all kinds of afflictions, with patience and resignation, but they are sorry, when God does not punish them for their sins, in this world; for they fear that he will punish them more severely, in the next. 'Burn, O Lord!' exclaimed Saint Austin, 'cut, and spare me not, in this life, that thou mayest spare me in eternity.'

Can there be a more strange stupidity, than to feel so little concern about the evils of the soul, and to be so sensible to those of the body? Should not our sins give us more trouble, and uneasiness, than any thing we may have to suffer to atone for them? By our sins, we have deserved hell,—we owe it to the divine mercy, that we are not, at this very moment, a prey to its devouring flames,—shall we, then, think that any temporal suffering can be too severe a punishment for transgressions, which have rendered us liable to eternal torments? No;—let us never lose sight of our sins, let us 'know our iniquity,' and we shall willingly resign ourselves to the will of God, when he chastises

us for them. 'I am ready for scourges,' said the psalmist,—would you know why?—'for I will think on my sin,' he immediately adds.¹ Again, 'Thou hast made me a reproach to the fool;—I opened not my mouth; because thou hast done it.'² Follow this example: in all painful occurrences, think of your sins; think of the will of God, and say, God has permitted it, God has done it,—be it so; 'it is the Lord; let him do what is good in his sight.'³

SECTION VII.

Conformity to the will of God with regard to supernatural gifts, and spiritual consolations.

CONFORMITY to the will of God is not only to be practised with regard to the good and evil things of this life, but it ought to extend to things spiritual and supernatural; such as, the gift of prayer, sensible devotion, the interior peace of the soul, and other blessings of grace, which might contribute much to our advancement and perfection. These supernatural gifts and spiritual comforts are undoubtedly advantageous and desirable, if we make good use of them, and, of course, we should be thankful to God, when he bestows them upon us; but yet, to desire them, merely on account of the inward consolation, which we derive from them, would be censurable, and the effect of self-love. Nay more, how pure soever our motives for desiring these supernatural blessings may be, this desire ought to be subordinate to the will of God; so that, when we are deprived of them, we should not be disturbed in mind, nor in the least disquieted. For the fulfilment of the divine will, is preferable to every thing else; and what is most important for us, is, to be entirely resigned to it.

1 Ps. xxxvii. 18. 19. 2 Ps. xxxviii. 9. 10. 3 1 Kings iii. 18.

I do not, however, mean to say, that we should not rejoice, when God vouchsafes to come near us, and be sorry, when he withdraws himself from us; for it is impossible for the soul not to experience those feelings, under such changes of circumstances. But, what I wish to intimate, is, that we should endeavor to derive our benefit from these trials, which God sometimes sends to his elect, by entirely resigning ourselves to the divine will, saying with Jesus,—when his soul was ‘sorrowful even unto death,’—‘Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.’¹

What ought to induce us still more to act in this manner, is, that the perfection of a Christian does not depend on the sweetness of sensible consolations. Our spiritual advancement is not measured by this; but by our love for God, which is independent of these consolations, and consists in our being entirely resigned to his divine will, in all things,—and thanking him, for all things. It was the advice of St. Paul to the Thessalonians: ‘In all things, give thanks; for this is the will of God, in Christ Jesus, concerning you all.’² Let us, therefore, say to ourselves, in times of spiritual dryness and aridity, ‘If it be the will of God, that I should be put to this trial, what else can I wish? I have nothing more at heart, than to please him; life was given me to that purpose; however darksome and rugged be the path, through which he chooses to lead me, I have no right to complain; and I would not wish to follow another, though ever so smooth and pleasant, against his holy will.’

1 Mat. xxvi. 39.

2 1 Thess. v. 18.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON MORTIFICATION.

SECTION I.

The necessity of mortification.

IN the happy state of original innocence, in which man was created, the sensual appetite was subject to reason. But reason having afterwards revolted against God by sin, the sensual appetite revolted against reason; and, hence there arise within us,—against our will and without our consent,—feelings and desires which we condemn. The greatest saints have not been exempt from this temptation: ‘The good which I will,’ says Saint Paul, ‘I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do.’¹—‘The corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down the mind.’² This conflict, between the spirit and the flesh, which man experiences within himself, is a just punishment of his disobedience: ‘He would not obey God,’ says St. Austin, ‘and now he is not obeyed even by himself.’

By original sin, man was deprived of the gifts of grace, and ‘wounded’ in the gifts of nature, as divines speak. For he not only lost original justice, and the supernatural gifts attached to it, but he experienced a great alteration in the natural gifts which he had received: his understanding was obscured, his free will weakened, and his inclination to good lessened; in a word, his whole nature was so much altered and impaired, that, what was at first easy for him, became

1 Rom. vii. 19.

2 Wis. ix. 15.

extremely difficult, and, without the grace of the Redeemer, often impossible. It is true, that by baptism, we are cleansed from original sin,—the ‘guilt’ of concupiscence is removed, says St. Austin;—but concupiscence itself, the ‘fuel of sin,’ still remains for our probation;—still, to use Saint Paul’s phrase, ‘the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and they are contrary one to another.’¹

This irregularity of the sensitive appetite forms the greatest obstacle to our progress in virtue. Thus we generally say, that the flesh is our greatest enemy, the source of our temptations, and the ordinary cause of our sins. ‘From whence are wars and contentions among you?’ asks St. James, ‘come they not hence? from your concupiscences, which war in your members?’² Sensuality, concupiscence, and self-love, are the causes of all the sins, faults, and imperfections of which we are guilty; and, by consequence, the greatest obstacle we can meet with in the road of perfection.

Mortification, by repressing the irregular inclinations of corrupt nature and self-love, remedies these evils. St. Jerom writing on these words of Christ, ‘if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me,’³ says: ‘He denies himself, and takes his cross, who, after having been dissipated, intemperate, and cowardly, becomes chaste, sober, and courageous.’ The same is applicable to the passage, from any other vice or imperfection, to the contrary virtue; from anger to patience, from pride to humility, from sloth and tepidity to the fervor of devotion. St. Basil, speaking on the same text, remarks, that our Saviour says first,—‘Let him deny himself;’—afterwards, adds, ‘Let him follow me.’ And, in truth, unless we first deny ourselves, renounce our own will, mortify our evil inclinations, we shall encounter a thousand obstacles,

1 Gal. v. 17.

2 James iv. 1.

3 Luke ix. 23.

which will prevent us from being able to follow Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must begin to open and smooth the way, by mortification, which is the necessary ground-work, not only of perfection, but of a christian life. This is the cross which we are bound daily to carry:—‘Always bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.’¹

The better to understand the necessity of mortification, let us consider that one of the greatest punishments, with which God visits the sins of his people, is to deliver them up to the desires of their heart, and the sensual appetites of the flesh:—‘My people heard not my voice, and Israel hearkened not to me; so I let them go according to the desires of their heart; they shall walk in their own inventions.’² And Saint Paul, speaking of the ancient philosophers, who, ‘when they had known God, did not glorify him, but became vain in their thoughts,’ says, ‘Wherefore, he gave them up to the desires of their heart—and delivered them up to shameful affections.’³ Wo to us! if we should ever fall into the power of so dangerous an enemy. He, says St. Ambrose, who is unable to restrain his desires, will soon be carried away by them, as by a ferocious courser, which can no longer be controlled, but hurries his rider headlong down the precipice. ‘If thou give to thy soul her desires,’ says the wise man, ‘she will make thee a joy to thy enemies.’⁴

If we reflect seriously upon the danger we run of losing our souls, by yielding to the suggestions of corrupt nature, we shall soon understand the necessity of that holy hatred of ourselves, which our Lord teaches us,⁵ and without which we cannot be his disciples.⁶ We shall no longer be astonished at the severity, which the saints used with themselves,

1 2 Cor. iv. 10.

2 Ps. lxxx. 12. 13.

3 Rom. i. 21. 24. 26.

4 Eccl. xviii. 30. 31.

5 John xii. 25.

6 Luke xiv. 26. 33—Gal. v. 24.

and the austerities which they practised. They took great care not to indulge the body, and kept it under subjection; because, they knew, that, if they should let it acquire too much strength, it would soon gain the ascendancy over the dictates of reason, and become ungovernable. Let us take care, says Saint Austin, not to let our body have undue vigor, lest it should wage war against our soul; but let us use all our endeavors to control and subdue it, for 'he that nourishes his servant delicately, afterwards shall find him stubborn.'¹

Worldly persons, who view mortification merely as a salutary restraint from criminal gratifications, are willing to admit its necessity, as a remedy, and under peculiar circumstances,—the lewd, the profane, the intemperate, and dissolute, they will grant, should refrain their unruly passions and appetites, mortify themselves, if you choose to call it so, by abstaining from vice,—but they are not enlightened or candid enough, to admit its absolute necessity, as an indispensable virtue. This truth, founded as it is in the knowledge of human nature, is still a mystery for the generality of Christians. They perhaps believe it, but as they will not understand it, they are sure to fail in its practice. However this may be, the saints, and all the masters of a spiritual life, have considered mortification as the necessary foundation of every other christian virtue, and the measure of our spiritual advancement and progress towards perfection.

'Your progress in virtue,' says the pious author of the Following of Christ, in the words of Saint Jerom, 'will be proportionate to the violence you use with yourself.'² If then, you wish to ascertain it by an infallible rule, examine what you have done to mortify yourself; what victory you have obtained over your passions; what is your disposition with regard to humility, patience, and self-denial. For it is

1 Prov. xxix. 21.

2 B. i. c. xxv.

thus, and not by the consolations and sweets of piety, that you will be able to know whether you have improved or not. It was by this rule, that St. Ignatius judged of the spiritual advancement of those, who confided to him the care of their souls; and St. Francis of Borgia used to say,—when he heard a person spoken of, as a saint,—‘he will be one indeed, if he be truly mortified.’ Doubtless, christian perfection consists, essentially, in the love of God; but if, by means of mortification, we succeed in correcting evil propensities, reforming bad habits, and purifying our affections, the love of God will at last preponderate in our hearts, which, being made for him, as Saint Austin remarks, must needs remain restless and disquieted until they repose in him. The increase of charity, says the same saint, is the diminution of concupiscence, and when concupiscence shall be entirely extinguished, then, charity will be perfect.

SECTION II.

Two sorts of mortification.

ST. AUSTIN, speaking on the text of St. Matthew, ‘from the days of John the Baptist, until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away,’¹ remarks, that there are two sorts of mortification—one corporal, which afflicts the body, as fasting, hair cloth, and the like austerities—the other, spiritual, which consists in ruling our passions, combating our evil inclinations, and overcoming our dangerous propensities, by constantly watching over our hearts and senses.

Of these two sorts of mortification, the latter is the more meritorious and elevated, and yet, nothing can excuse us from practising it; but we may sometimes have good reasons

to dispense with the former. Sickness, and even the weakness of our constitution, may dispense us from abstaining, fasting, and other bodily austerities; but we can never be too sick or too weak, to be humble, patient, and resigned.

‘God,’ says Fenelon, ‘makes us practise mortification, at all times, and every moment; but the maxim, that we must always choose what is most mortifying and painful to nature, is altogether erroneous. By following it in our conduct, we should soon ruin our health, our affairs, our intercourse with our friends, and the good works of which divine Providence has given us the care. As to austerities, regard is to be had to the state of life, the wants, and the constitution of those who feel a desire to practise them. A constant fidelity to God, under the crosses which his Providence sends us, is preferable to the practice of great mortifications, which attract notice, make us pass for singular, and tend to inspire us with vain complacency in ourselves. Whoever refuses nothing, within the order of divine Providence, and seeks nothing, beyond that order, never ends the day without having shared in the cross of Jesus Christ. There is a providence for crosses, as for all the necessities of life; they are our daily bread; God never suffers us to be in want of them. Nay, it is sometimes a most pure mortification for holy and fervent souls, not to mortify themselves, according to their wishes, but to let God mortify them, when, and in the manner he pleases.’

‘He who is not faithful under the trials to which God himself puts him, has great reason to fear lest his desire of extraordinary sufferings and mortifications, be a deceitful illusion. I believe that it is well to begin by trying ourselves in this fidelity to daily crosses, sent us by Providence.’—Thus far Fenelon.

To these general principles, I shall only add, with all the masters of a spiritual life, that we should not have recourse to extraordinary bodily mortification or austerities, without

the approbation of an enlightened and prudent director, who ought to be also well acquainted with our motives for wishing to practise them, and the other circumstances, relative to our health, our profession, &c. already enumerated.

SECTION III.

Love and hatred of ourselves.

GOD forbid, says Saint Austin, that the spirit should hate the flesh; no,—it hates its vices, its prudence, its rebellion. As a physician loves his patient, whilst he hates and combats the disease; so the spirit loves the flesh, but resists and mortifies its disorderly inclinations. And, in truth, love consists in wishing or doing good; hatred, in wishing or doing harm: but, he who mortifies his body, wishes to obtain for it the blessing of a glorious resurrection; therefore, he truly loves it. On the contrary, those who flatter and indulge the body, hate it; because they procure for it eternal torments. Certain worldlings having expressed to Saint Bernard their astonishment at the austere life led by his religious, and said that they showed great hatred to their bodies by treating them so badly, the holy Abbot answered,—‘Pardon me, you are mistaken; it is you, who hate your bodies; since, for the sake of some momentary enjoyments, you expose them to become a prey to endless sufferings: but these men love their bodies; for they deal with them severely, in this life, in order to secure for them eternal rest in the next.’

Saint Austin, in his comments on these words of Christ, ‘whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it,’¹ exclaims: ‘Behold a great and astonishing maxim!—the love of man for

1 Mat. xvi. 25.

his life, causes it to perish ; and his hatred preserves it. If you love it improperly, you hate it ; if you hate it properly, you love it. Do not, then, love it in this world, lest you should lose it in the next. Happy those who hate, and preserve it !—‘He that loveth his life, shall lose it ; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life everlasting.’¹ The same saint remarks, elsewhere, that we may love one thing, though we love another more. Thus, he who consents to the amputation of one of his limbs, in order to save his life, still loves that limb ; but he loves his life more. In like manner, he who mortifies his body, to save his soul, does not therefore, cease to love it ; but he loves his soul more. His conduct is not the effect of a want of love for the body ; but of a greater love for God, his soul, his perfection, and life everlasting.

He who lives according to the desires of the body, says Saint Ambrose, is flesh ; and he who lives agreeably to the commands of God, is spirit. But, adds St. Austin, if we live according to the spirit, we become like the angels ; on the contrary, if we follow the desires of the flesh, we lower ourselves to the condition of the brutes.—What degradation ! Can any thing be conceived more unbecoming and unworthy the dignity of a rational being,—made after the image and likeness of God, and destined to enjoy eternal happiness in heaven,—than to be a slave to appetites, and propensities, similar to those by which the brute creation is guided ? Alas ! ‘Man,’ then, to use the language of the psalmist, ‘when he is in honor, does not understand ; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them !’²

After reflecting seriously on the truths already laid down in this chapter, some one will say : I am satisfied of the utility, and necessity of mortification ; but, when I consider its difficulties, and the privations to which it would subject me, I feel an insurmountable repugnance to its practice.—

Why, answers Saint Basil, if for the health and preservation of our body, we willingly take the most bitter and disgusting remedies, and submit to the painful operations of surgery; if, to acquire wealth, we encounter so much danger, both by sea and land, and undergo so many hardships,—what should we not do to preserve the life of our soul, and obtain heaven?—should we not generously surmount every obstacle, and overcome every difficulty? But,—as we are naturally averse to labor and trouble, and wish to suffer as little as possible,—I shall add, with St. Austin, that there is less trouble in the practice of mortification, than in the indulgence of our evil propensities. Thou hast ordered it, O Lord! he says, and so it is;—every disorderly mind is its own tormentor. Of all kinds of slavery, that which they experience, who live under the absolute control of their passions, is unquestionably the most galling. Other slaves are free in the noblest part of themselves;—their bodies can be chained, and fettered; but their will remains uncontrolled. When they are commanded any thing contrary to conscience and duty, they can refuse to obey; and, if necessary, vindicate their liberty by the loss of their life. But the slaves to their own passions, have lost, what the cruelty of conquerors cannot take away from their captives,—the power and the will of regulating their own hearts, according to the laws of God and conscience. The former, sigh after liberty, and take every means in their power to recover it; the latter, love their slavery, and render their emancipation daily more difficult, until it becomes, at last, morally impossible. They daily rivet their chains, and multiply their masters.

The effects of the passions on the heart of man, are properly compared to those of a storm on the ocean. 'The wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest, and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire.'¹ Let the winds be

1 Isaias lvii. 20.

hushed, and a calm will ensue. In like manner, let our passions be restrained;—then will tranquillity and peace be restored to our souls.

What we say of the passions, must also be understood of all natural inclinations, that are not conformable to the perfection to which we should aspire, according to our vocation, and the peculiar graces we have received from God. To yield to them, will deprive us of those interior consolations, of that joy of a good conscience, which we experience, when we counteract and reform them. Indulgence to them, will produce remorse; remorse, will make us lose the peace of our souls; and, that blessing once lost, every thing will become troublesome, and dangerous. We shall lose that strong confidence in the protection of God, which is founded on fidelity to grace, and constant watchfulness over ourselves; we shall insensibly become a prey to uneasiness of mind, serious alarms, and perhaps awful despair. On the contrary, if we use a holy violence with ourselves, if we ‘watch’ over the emotions and desires of our hearts, and unmercifully retrench the causes of sin,—‘cut off the hand, or foot, and pluck out the eye, that scandalizes us,’¹—we shall be amply repaid for our efforts and sacrifices, by the peace, content, and consolation, with which God Almighty will reward us, even in this life. Besides, ‘it is better for us to enter into life, maimed, or lame, or with one eye, than,—having two hands, two feet, and two eyes,—to be cast into hell-fire.’²

1 Mat. xviii. 8. 9.

2 Mat. xviii. 8. 9.

SECTION IV.

The practice of mortification.

ST. BERNARD, speaking on the practice of mortification, says, that we ought to deal with ourselves, as we do with a sick person. We refuse him every thing that might be injurious to his health, even if he should desire it ardently; and we make him take whatever may be beneficial to him, though he be greatly averse to it. So, in like manner, we should deny ourselves all things that may prove dangerous to the spiritual health of our souls, and prevail upon ourselves to do whatever may contribute to preserve, or recover it. For in reality, we are all infirm and sick;—our passions and evil inclinations are our diseases. ‘Our fever,’ says a father of the church, ‘is pride, our fever is ambition, our fever is sensuality, our fever is anger.’

We should, in the first place, avail ourselves of the opportunities to practise mortification, which daily present themselves. And if we are careful to watch them, we shall find many. Difference of opinion, interests, views, and manners, on the part of our fellow-beings,—independently of their passions, with which we shall often have to contend,—will afford us incessant occasion of self-denial, in our necessary intercourse with them. Sickness, poverty, mental aridities, and other spiritual trials, will also call for the exercise of the same virtue. These are the circumstances, in which we should first learn the practice, and acquire the habit of mortification; so as to improve into a source of virtue and merit, what we have to suffer, whether we will or not. One great advantage in these mortifications is, that there is no danger of illusion in them, as there may be in those which we seek ourselves. It is a great consolation for the pious to know, that, by submitting to them, they do

the will of God, who either sends them himself, or permits them to arise from secondary causes. And we cannot but pity the blindness, and deplore the presumption of those, who, while they would wish to be allowed the practice of great austerities, are unwilling to bear with patience, the troubles and privations, which they cannot avoid. For, unavoidable as they are, these mortifications could be rendered meritorious, by being borne with resignation and humility.

We ought to accustom ourselves frequently to abstain from lawful gratifications, lest we should insensibly be led to indulge those which are prohibited. The utility and salutary effects of this practice, are beautifully described by Dr. Johnson. 'Austerities and mortifications,' he says, 'are means by which the mind is invigorated and roused; by which the attractions of pleasure are interrupted, and the chains of sensuality are broken.—Abstinence, if nothing more, is at least, a cautious retreat from the utmost verge of permission, and confers that security which cannot be reasonably hoped by him that dares always to hover over the precipice of destruction, or delights to approach the pleasures which he knows it is fatal to partake. Austerity is the proper antidote to indulgence; the diseases of mind as well as body are cured by contraries, and to contraries we should readily have recourse, if we dreaded guilt as we dread pain.'

The saints were ingenious in devising means to practise this kind of mortification, and their lives abound with instances of the assiduity with which they applied to it.—When we read them, do we say to ourselves, with Saint Austin,—'can I not do, what they have done?'—Do we not, on the contrary, too easily imagine that God does not require so much of us, as he did of them; and instead of endeavoring to imitate their conduct, content ourselves with admiring their actions? Saint Bonaventure recommends mortification in the most innocent things; such as to take, or not to take

a flower, when we are walking in a garden. The pious, he adds, should often deprive themselves of looking at this, of listening to that, of enjoying this thing, of procuring that other. 'By abstaining from things lawful,' says St. Gregory, 'we are more sure never to encroach upon things forbidden.'

The practice of mortification may also extend to things which are absolutely necessary. Not, that we should dispense with doing our duty, and fulfilling our obligations.—By no means.—We should not 'do evil, that there may come good.'¹ But, we ought, in the discharge of our most essential duties, to divest ourselves of our own will, and natural inclinations; never doing, nor saying, nor desiring any thing, however useful or necessary, because we like or need it, but with a view to obey and please God. By this means, we shall be able to unite the practice of mortification and self-denial with the faithful performance of all our duties. This doctrine is of great perfection. To apply to our duty, with pleasure and cheerfulness,—not on account of the satisfaction it may give us or through natural inclination, but for God's sake,—is renouncing and mortifying ourselves, in what is most dear to us, and truly 'doing all things for the glory of God.'²

There are persons, who bestow particular care on the regulation of their external deportment, who show great modesty and reserve in their intercourse with society; but who lay entirely aside interior mortification, and are utter strangers to its practice. We may apply to them what our Lord said to the scribes and pharisees: 'wo to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! because you make clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but within, you are full of extortion and uncleanness;—you are like to whited sepulchres, which, outwardly, appear to men beautiful, but within, are full of dead men's bones, and of all filthiness.'³ The attention we pay to our external conduct, unless it be

1 Rom. iii. 8.

2 1 Cor. x. 31.

3 Mat. xxiii. 25. 27.

accompanied with watchfulness over the emotions of our hearts, and the government of our passions, can be of little service to us; and if it be made a pretext to dispense with these necessary restraints, it is a dangerous illusion, and a sort of hypocrisy.

Let us also take care not to imitate the conduct of those who are very particular in mortifying themselves, with regard to things of no importance,—often mere trifles, which require no sacrifice of their inclinations,—whilst they carefully avoid all mortifications, that would lessen their gratifications, deprive them of their favorite enjoyments, and undermine their predominant passions. These persons too, like the scribes and pharisees, ‘pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and leave alone the weightier things of the law.’¹

We ought to begin by what is most important;—that peculiar vice, that besetting passion, that inveterate habit,—which daily causes us to commit sin, and perhaps holds us captive in its chains,—is what we should first mortify in ourselves. After the example of the prophet king, we should ‘pursue after these our mortal enemies, and overtake them; and we should not turn again till they are consumed.’²—But, at the same time that we direct our attention, principally and habitually, to the conquest of those passions, and the destruction of those habits, from which we apprehend the greatest danger, we should not omit the practice of mortification in other things, which, though less important in themselves, are still an obstacle to our perfection. We can say of these different sorts of mortification, what our Saviour said to the scribes and pharisees, on the occasion already alluded to:—‘These things you ought to have done, and not to leave those others undone.’³

I shall not repeat here, what I have said, elsewhere, on the utility which we may derive from little things, and the dan-

1 Mat. xxiii. 23.

2 Ps. xvii. 38.

3 Mat. xxiii. 23.

ger to which we expose ourselves by neglecting them, but briefly apply this fundamental doctrine of a spiritual life to the present subject.

Mortification essentially consists in renouncing our own will—this is truly the self-denial, so often recommended in the gospel—whence it follows, that its merit is independent of the things in which it is practised, and proportionate to the violence we have to use with ourselves in conquering our natural opposition and reluctance to them. Moreover, as we sometimes find it more difficult to divest ourselves of our own will in things of little moment, than in those which are most important, the consequence is, that we may acquire more merit by practising mortification in the former case, than in the latter. ‘We would much rather make certain great sacrifices, though ever so painful and arduous,’ says Fenelon, ‘on condition that we should enjoy the liberty to follow our own will and propensities in the ordinary details of life.’ Again, the opportunities of mortifying ourselves in little things are of daily occurrence: ‘They return every instant,’—remarks the same author,—‘they incessantly come in contact with our pride, our vanity, our sloth, our humor, and all our other inclinations.’ Not to improve them, is, therefore, to deprive ourselves of an efficacious and habitual means to renounce our own will, and to acquire, by degrees, a perfect control over our passions. This neglect is also productive of another great evil:—by frequently indulging our natural inclinations, in things which we consider of little importance, we make them stronger;—they become imperious;—and, on the most important occasions,—when to act against them is an indispensable duty,—greater exertions are required, than we may be willing to use.

SECTION V.

Remarks on the practice of mortification, relative to different sorts of persons.

THE great diversity which exists among men, upon almost every subject, presents itself under three different forms, with regard to the practice of mortification.

There are persons who seem to have inherited from our common parent, a greater share of that 'proneness to evil,' with which we are all born, than generally falls to the lot of mankind.¹ They have a great deal to contend with, from their natural disposition; they find it extremely difficult to resist their inclinations, and control their passions. In a word, their temptations are many, and violent; but their will is good, their intention pure, and their piety sincere. To these, I shall say, with all the masters of a spiritual life: Be not disturbed in mind, lose not the peace of your soul; there is neither sin, nor imperfection, in feeling such repugnance and opposition, against your will, and without your consent.

The greatest saints were liable to such temptations. Sons of Adam, as well as we, 'conceived in iniquity,'² and 'by nature children of wrath,'³ they had principles of depravity in common with us; but they counteracted those principles, and we suffer them to predominate, and superadd the force of habit to the infirmity of nature. Moses was naturally of a warm temper, yet, by fidelity to grace, prayer, and vigilance, he surmounted this temptation, and deserved to be called 'a man exceedingly meek above all men that dwelt upon earth.'⁴ The same propensities, and the same triumph over them, were observed, nearly four thousand years after, in St. Ignatius, St. Francis of Sales, and many others. The

1 Gen. viii. 21.

2 Ps. 1. 7.

3 Eph. ii. 3.

4 Numb. xii. 3.

confessions of St. Austin will witness to all ages, that the brightest virtues can be engrafted upon the most degrading passions. 'I know,' says St. Paul, 'that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh, that which is good;—to will good, is present with me; but to accomplish that which is good, I find not;—I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man; but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind.'¹

In a word, however troublesome may be the temptations, by which some persons are assailed, and how strong soever the natural repugnance, which they experience to the faithful observance of their duties, if they do not lose courage, but combat against them, with firmness and resolution, the greater their struggles are, the greater will be their merit, and their reward.

Whilst self-denial and mortification are attended with so much difficulty, with regard to many Christians, there are others, who feel no repugnance to whatever duty prescribes, and conscience dictates. 'They have received a good soul,'² and 'it seems,' as Alexander of Hales used to say of Saint Bonaventure, 'that they have sinned only in Adam.' Being naturally inclined to virtue, they find every thing easy in the service of God; things, which would be most arduous to others, give them no trouble, and cost them no labor.

Doubtless, such persons have been blessed with a happy disposition; yet it has its dangers;—it generally excludes almost every other temptation; but it may become one itself;—it often leads to pride, and presumption;—it raises us, and lowers our neighbor, in our estimation. To guard against evils so great and so frequent, let these privileged souls remember that the great facility, which they find in complying with all their duties, is not the effect of their own exertions, but a gift of God, for which they shall have to account to him, and that 'unto whomsoever much is given,

1 Rom. vii. 18. 22. 23.

2 Wis. viii. 19.

of him much shall be required.’¹ Let them often say to themselves, in the language of St. Paul, ‘what have we that we have not received? and if we have received, why do we glory, as if we had not received it?’² They should also be persuaded that God,—by bestowing upon them virtuous inclinations, and exempting them from almost every kind of temptation,—wished to spare their natural weakness, which he knew to be unable to stand greater trials. Such considerations will induce them to cherish sentiments of humility with regard to themselves, of esteem for their neighbor, and of gratitude to God.

We also meet with persons who experience none of those oppositions and repugnances, from the corruption of nature and evil inclinations, by which the most pious are sometimes disturbed;—not that they have conquered them, or are naturally inclined to virtue;—but, because, they never attempt to resist, and surmount them. Their situation is the more deplorable, as they are not aware of its danger. Were they to pause, and carefully to compare their conduct with their duties, and not with their feelings and inclinations, they would soon be undeceived, and justly alarmed at the great contrast, which exists between them. They would then, become conscious of their slavery, and understand, at last, that they have evil inclinations to contend with, and passions to subdue.

We read an anecdote, in the lives of the fathers of the desert, which may be introduced here, with propriety.—A hermit, who was not remarkable for his piety, conversing one day with an old man, well acquainted with the principles and practice of a spiritual life, put him this question: How does it happen, said he, that I do not feel within myself those temptations and inward struggles, of which so many others complain?—It is, answered the old man, because your interior is like a house, the doors of which

1 Luke xii. 48.

2 1 Cor. iv. 7.

are always left open, so that any one can enter into it, without the knowledge of the master. You neglect to watch over your heart and senses; evil thoughts meet with no opposition from you,—all the avenues lie open,—they enter without a struggle. But, use more vigilance and circumspection, and you will soon have to carry on that internal warfare, which you do not now sustain.

Saint Bernard is of opinion that a Christian who aims at perfection, should always have the pruning-knife in his hand; for, what progress soever he may have made in the practice of virtue, he will often have occasion to use it. Believe me, he says, what has been cut, shoots forth again; what was sent away, returns; what was extinguished, will soon be rekindled; and that which is asleep, will awake on a sudden. You deceive yourself, if you believe you have entirely destroyed vice in you.—It is not enough to have cut it off once; you will always find something to correct, and retrench. The war in which a soldier is engaged, is short, says Saint Ephrem, but that which we have to carry on, lasts all our life.

The best land will not yield a plentiful harvest unless it is properly cultivated, and it will bring forth thorns and briars, when neglected and left to itself; so, in like manner, the most virtuous need cultivation: they ought to watch assiduously over themselves, both to preserve what they have acquired, and to 'go from virtue to virtue.' They have to secure the reward to which they are entitled, by the same means by which they have deserved it,—that is, by the practice of mortification, penance, and self-denial,—and to obtain the gift of perseverance, by fervent prayer, and constant vigilance. 'Know you not,' says St. Paul, 'that they who run in the race, all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run that you may obtain. And every one that striveth for the mastery, refraineth himself from all things: and they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown; but we

an incorruptible one. I therefore so run, not as at an uncertainty; I so fight, not as one beating the air; but I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection.’¹

To conclude:—whether our natural inclinations be good, or bad;—whether we be in the state of sin, beginners, or far advanced in the career of virtue,—we are all under an indispensable necessity of practising mortification. To subdue the passions, to curb the senses, ‘to crucify the flesh,’² are positive precepts of the gospel. Jesus Christ carried his cross, and commanded us to carry ours ‘daily.’³ To hope to obtain the rewards of him, whose commands we violate, is an illusion; and to pretend to be the disciples of one who was born in a stable, and died on a cross, whilst we lead an unmortified life, is a palpable contradiction.

SECTION VI.

Means which facilitate the practice of mortification.

AMONG the various means, by which the practice of mortification is rendered not only easy, but even pleasing, I shall select and propose these four—the help of divine grace—the love of God—the hope of future rewards—the consideration of the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

1. With the help of God’s grace, we can do easily whatever duty requires of us, however difficult and arduous it may be in itself. St. Paul, oppressed by the violence of his temptations, earnestly prayed to be freed from them,—‘my grace is sufficient for thee,’⁴ answered the Lord; and with this divine assistance, he found himself so strong, that he afterwards wrote to the Philippians, ‘I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.’⁵ No;—God does not leave

1 1 Cor. ix. 24—27.

2 Gal. v. 24.

3 Luke xix. 23.—Mat. x. 38.—xvi. 24.

4 2 Cor. xii. 9.

5 Philip. iv. 13.

us to ourselves, in the practice of mortification;—he ‘who is with us in tribulation,’¹—from what cause soever it may proceed,—will not forsake us in those struggles which we experience within ourselves, when, to obey his precepts, we take up our cross, and endeavor to walk in his footsteps.

When Jesus Christ invites us to go to him in our troubles, he promises that ‘he will refresh us.’ When he bids us ‘take up his yoke upon ourselves,’ he assures us that it is ‘sweet,’ and that ‘his burden is light.’² Because, however hard and heavy they may appear to those who consider only the weakness of human nature, they become sweet and light, when the Lord himself helps us to bear them. ‘Let not the name of yoke terrify you,’ says Fenelon. ‘You bear the weight of it, but God bears it with you, and more than you; for it is a yoke which must be borne by two, and it is his yoke and not yours. Jesus Christ makes us love this yoke. He supports us against ourselves, he withdraws us from our natural corruption, and makes us strong in spite of our weakness. O man of little faith! what do you fear? Let God deal with you as he pleases, and rely entirely upon him. You will have to fight, but you will gain the victory, and he himself, after having fought on your side, will crown you with his own hands.’

2. The love of God is another most efficacious means, cheerfully to persevere in the practice of mortification. He who loves God, finds nothing difficult in his service. He either feels no trouble in what he does for him, or if he feels any, he loves it. Where there is love, says St. Austin, there is no labor, or if there be any, it is dear to us. Love God much, and not only will you find no difficulty in what appears most arduous in self-denial and mortification, but you will derive great comfort, and true consolation from its constant practice. Love, which prompts us to obey the commandments, renders obedience, at once, meritorious

1 Ps. xc. 15.

2 Mat. xi. 28. 29. 30.

before God, and pleasing to us. Hence, Saint Paul calls it 'The fulfilment of the law;'¹ because, as Saint Chrysostom remarks, it facilitates the performance of the most arduous duties.

3. The hope of the reward which we shall obtain by persevering in the practice of mortification and self-denial, is a third means to soften their asperity, and alleviate their burden. The view of future rewards supported and comforted the true servants of God in the severest trials and most bitter sufferings. Job bore with resignation the multiplied strokes of affliction, by which his patience was tried, in the hope of a glorious resurrection: 'I know,' he said, 'that in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and in my flesh I shall see my God;—this my hope is laid up in my bosom.'² After almighty God had called Abram, and bid him leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house,³ he encouraged him, by the hope of the recompense, which he promised to him: 'Fear not,' he said, 'I am thy reward exceeding great.'⁴ 'Moses chose rather to suffer persecution with the people of God, than to have the pleasure of sin for a time,—for he looked unto the reward,' says Saint Paul.⁵ The royal prophet was animated to the faithful observance of the commandments, by the same consideration: 'I have inclined my heart to do thy justifications, for the reward.'⁶ Nor was the hope of future rewards considered by the saints of the Old Testament only, as a strong motive to suffer all kinds of privation and tribulations, it was also held out to Christians, by Jesus Christ himself. In his sermon upon the mount,—which may be regarded as the abridgement of his doctrine,—after having called them 'blessed,' who would cultivate the sublime virtues, which he had come to teach his followers, he induces us all to their practice, by the promise of the eternal happiness to

1 Rom. xiii. 10.

3 Gen. xii. 1.

5 Heb. xi. 25. 26.

2 Job xix. 25. 26. 27.

4 Gen. xv. 1.

6 Ps. cxviii. 112.

which they lead: 'Blessed are the poor—the meek—they that mourn—they that hunger and thirst after justice—the merciful—the clean of heart—the peace-makers—they that suffer persecution,—for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'¹ And again: 'Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,—rejoice, and be exceeding glad, because your reward is very great in heaven.'²

Let the practice of mortification cost us ever so much, be it ever so painful to nature; it must needs appear truly desirable, when we bear in mind the endless bliss with which it will be rewarded: 'For our present tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.'³ Were we duly to consider the value of the recompense, promised to those who carry the cross daily, by leading a mortified life, we should be satisfied that we obtain it upon easy terms, and purchase heaven at a very low price. Among men, remarks St. Anthony, there is an equality observed, between the thing bought and the price given for it, and each one is to give as much as he receives; but it is not so in our dealings with God;—he bestows eternal and invaluable rewards, for short and often insignificant troubles.—'The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come.'⁴

4. St. Paul advises us to make use of a fourth means, to animate ourselves to the practice of mortification;—it is the consideration of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. 'By patience,' he says, 'let us run to the fight proposed unto us; looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, having joy proposed unto him, underwent the cross;—think diligently upon him, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds.'⁵ This means was used by all the saints with great fidelity, and to great advantage. For, besides that there is nothing better calculated to induce us to lead a mortified

1 Mat. v. 3—10.

3 2 Cor. iv. 17.

5 Heb. xii. 1. 2. 3.

2 Mat. v. 11. 12.

4 Rom. viii. 18.

life, than to propose to ourselves the example of Jesus Christ, suffering and dying for us; it is also an exercise of great perfection, which adds a new value to all our sufferings, by the purity of the motive with which we submit to them.

SECTION VII.

Three degrees of mortification.

ST. BERNARD distinguishes three degrees of mortification, by which, as by so many steps, we may rise to the summit of perfection. The first degree is that which is taught us by Saint Peter, when he says: 'Dearly beloved! I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves from carnal desires, which war against the soul.'¹ We are all strangers here, and on our way to our heavenly country; 'for here we have no permanent city; but seek one to come;'² and 'while we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord.'³ Let us, therefore, behave ourselves as travellers, who are at a great distance from home. A traveller, says Saint Bernard, goes straight on, and tries to avoid all that might stop, or retard him in his journey. He does not lose his time in meddling with the concerns of those he meets on his way, but steadily hastens towards his destination; he is satisfied with a plain dress and homely fare, and takes nothing along with him that might delay his arrival. This is the example we should imitate, in the course of our pilgrimage on this earth; nothing ought to stop us in our way. We should not care for any thing, but what is absolutely necessary to carry us to the end of our journey; 'having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we should be content.'⁴ 'Our hearts,'⁵ and warmest affections, should

1 1 Pet. ii. 11.

2 Heb. xiii. 14.

3 2 Cor. v. 6.

4 1 Tim. vi. 8.

5 Luke xii. 34.

be 'there, where our treasure is;' we should, after the example of David, bewail the length of our exile, and cherish the sentiment which he entertained, when he said, 'wo is me that my sojourning is prolonged!'¹

To this first degree of mortification, Saint Bernard adds another. Although a traveller, says he, makes no long stay in the places through which he passes, yet, he sometimes has the curiosity to see what is going on, and prolongs his journey. Moreover, he is always in need of something or other;—he must take time to rest himself, to eat, &c.—all this stops, and delays him. We should be in this world as dead men. A dead man does not feel the want of any thing; not even the want of a grave. He is equally insensible to either praise or censure, flattery or detraction. This is the high degree of mortification, to which Saint Paul alluded, when he wrote to the Colossians: 'You are dead; and your life is hidden with Christ in God.'² Happy death! exclaims St. Bernard, or rather happy life! which preserves us pure, and immaculate amid the contagion of the age!

This second degree of mortification seems to be the highest to which we might aspire, yet St. Paul teaches us another still higher, when he says, 'the world is crucified to me, and I to the world.'³ That is, pleasures, honors, riches, esteem, and applause, are all a cross to me; on the contrary, what the world dreads, and regards as an evil, that I consider as a blessing. He who has arrived at this perfection, is not satisfied, as the traveller, provided he is not retarded in his journey by the enjoyment of the good things of this life, nor is he, as the dead man, merely indifferent about them; but he goes further,—he views them as a misfortune,—he 'glories in the cross of Jesus Christ,'⁴ and 'exceedingly abounds with joy in all his tribulations.'⁵

1 Ps. cxix. 5.

3 Gal. vi. 14.

5 2 Cor. viii. 4

2 Col. iii. 3.

4 Gal. vi. 14.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON HUMILITY.

SECTION I.

Excellence and necessity of humility.

To understand the excellence of humility, and the need we have of it, it is enough to consider that the Son of God came down from heaven to teach it to us, and to recommend its practice, by his own example, from the day on which he was born in a stable and cradled in a manger, till he was nailed to the cross, and died between two thieves. For,—‘why such abasement in the Lord of Majesty?’ asks St. Bernard,—‘It was,’ he answers, in the words of the psalmist, ‘that man may no more presume to magnify himself upon earth.’¹ ‘To yield to pride and vanity,’ adds the same saint, ‘was at all times unbecoming; but after the humiliations of Jesus Christ, it would be insufferable impudence. The Son of God took the form of a servant, chose to be humbled and despised,—and, shall I, who am nothing but dust and ashes, wish to be honoured and respected?’

Wishing to call the attention of his disciples to the instructions he was about to give them, Christ once addressed them thus, ‘Learn of me,’—and what was it he wished to teach them, on that occasion?—‘It was not,’ remarks St. Austin, ‘how to make the world, create all things, visible and invisible, raise the dead to life, and perform the most wonderful miracles,—but, ‘that he was meek and humble of

heart.' 'Do you aspire to great things,' he adds, 'begin with those that are little. The higher you intend to raise a building, the deeper should you lay the foundation.' The same rule is to be followed with regard to the spiritual edifice of your perfection;—it should be erected upon the solid foundation of profound humility, and it will rise to the greatest height to which it can attain in this world, until it be completed in the next.

The necessity of humility is so great, that, without it, we cannot hope to advance one step in the way of perfection. It is called, by St. Cyprian, 'the groundwork of holiness;' by St. Jerom, 'the first of christian virtues;' by St. Gregory and St. Bernard, 'the parent, the mistress, the root, the source, the foundation and guardian of all virtues.'—Unless it precedes, accompanies, and follows, all our good actions, says St. Austin, pride will soon make us lose the merit of them; and the better they are in themselves, the greater will be our danger from this insidious passion, which hides itself, mingles with our best undertakings, and deprives us of the merit we might derive from them.

SECTION II.

The subject continued—Enumeration of the principal virtues, showing how they are all founded on humility.

THE truth of the maxim of the saints, that humility is the foundation of all other virtues, can easily be illustrated, by considering the nature and object of the principal among them.

In the first place, faith stands in need of humility. For, with the exception of infants, into whose souls it is infused by baptism, without any act of theirs, faith, 'bringing into

captivity every understanding to the obedience of Christ,'¹ requires an humble and docile spirit. Pride is so great an obstacle to our receiving it, that Christ said to the Jews: 'How can you believe, who receive glory one from another; and the glory which is from God alone, you do not seek?'² But if humility is so necessary to receive faith, it is not less so, to preserve it; and the holy fathers are of opinion, that pride is the source of all heresies. This, St. Paul himself insinuates, when he says: 'Know also this, that, in the last days, shall come dangerous times; men shall be lovers of themselves—haughty, proud, puffed up—always learning, and never attaining to the knowledge of truth—reprobate as to faith—erring, and driving into error.'³

Hope also is supported by humility.—The humble know their weakness, and their incapacity to do good, without the help of God; therefore, they look to him for assistance in all their wants, and rely entirely upon him, both for this, and for the next world. Diffidence of ourselves, which is the necessary consequence of humility, increases our confidence in our God; and we are thus led to establish our hope on its true and essential foundation,—the aid of grace, the merits of Jesus Christ, and his promises.

Charity, which consists in loving God above all things, is greatly increased by humility; for he who is truly humble looks upon every thing he has, as a gift he received from the liberality of God, and is, by this consideration, prompted to love his benefactor. 'What is man,' said Job, 'that thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost thou set thy heart upon him?'⁴ The more conscious we are of our unworthiness, the more we feel ourselves obliged to love Him, whose 'mercy follows us, all the days of our life,' and will reward our labors and perseverance with 'a never fading crown of glory.' As regards charity towards our neighbor, it is easy to understand how much humility contributes to

facilitate its practice. For it removes the most ordinary causes of disunion among men, such as self-love, pride, rash judgment, and jealousy, which are all incompatible with christian humility.

Patience too, of which we have so great need in our intercourse with our fellow-men, and in the various trials of this life, is the natural effect of humility. For, humility, by showing us our faults and many imperfections, induces us to bear with those of others, and to submit, with calm resignation, to whatever God may permit, either for our probation, or for our chastisement. Under the severest strokes of affliction, the man who is truly humble will say, with the prophet Micheas, 'I will bear the wrath of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.'¹ The proud are apt to be easily provoked to anger, for they always imagine that they are not treated with the respect and attention to which they are entitled. But an humble man is always satisfied with the treatment he receives, and however bad it may be, he thinks it no more than he deserves, on account of his sins, and daily imperfections:—'he humbles his heart, and endures.'²

Peace of mind is particularly promoted by humility. It is the reward which Jesus Christ promises to those who will learn it from him, and practise it after his example: 'Learn of me,' he says, 'because I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls.'³ Be humble, and you will enjoy peace with yourselves, and with your neighbor; on the contrary, 'among the proud, there are always contentions.'⁴

Purity is necessarily based on humility, and it receives from it its brightest ornament. St. Bernard does not hesitate to say, that, without humility, not even the purity of Mary could have been pleasing to God.

1 Mich. vii. 9.

2 Eccl. ii. 2.

3 Mat. xi. 29.

4 Prov. xiii. 10.

Prayer, without which salvation is not to be obtained, derives its efficacy from humility: 'The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds.'¹ 'The prayer of the humble and the meek hath always pleased thee.'² 'He hath had regard to the prayer of the humble; and he hath not despised their petition.'³

By extending this enumeration further, it might easily be shown that all virtues are indispensably connected with humility; so that, if you wish to have a sure means to acquire them, and to arrive at christian perfection, take this,—Be humble.

SECTION III.

The knowledge of ourselves is the foundation of humility.

SAINT BERNARD defines humility—'A virtue, by which, from the true knowledge of ourselves, we become little in our own estimation.' Let us, therefore, dwell on the consideration of what we are; let us know ourselves well; and we shall soon be humble. For humility is founded on truth; it does not proceed from the opinion which others may have of us, but, from a correct view of what we really are.

In the first place, what are we, with regard to the body? Its origin and destiny are distinctly marked by our maker: 'Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return.'⁴ In the meantime, what are we to expect?—'Man,' answers Job, 'living for a short time, is filled with many miseries.'⁵ And again: 'I have said to rottenness, Thou art my father; to worms, My mother and my sister.'⁶ 'My substance is as nothing before thee, O Lord!' exclaims the royal prophet.⁷ 'All flesh is grass,' says Isaias, 'and all the glory thereof as

1 Eccl. xxxv. 21.

4 Gen. iii. 19.

6 Job xvii 14.

2 Judith ix. 16.

5 Job xiv. 1.

7 Ps. xxxviii 6.

3 Ps. ci. 18.

the flower of the field. The grass is withered, and the flower is fallen; because the Spirit of the Lord hath blown upon it.—‘All nations are before him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to him as nothing, and vanity.’¹ Hence, Saint Paul concludes, that, ‘If any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.’² Before God made us, we were nothing;—we have, in no manner, contributed to our existence,—‘thy hands have made me, and formed me,’ says the psalmist.³ ‘It is he, who giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;—in him we live, and we move, and we are.’⁴—Therefore, of ourselves, we are nothing.

Let us proceed in the examination of ourselves.—But, can we go further? can there be room for investigation beyond nothing? Yes, beneath this depth, there is still a lower depth;—there is the depth of sin. Within the whole range of creation, there exists nothing so despicable, in the sight of God, as a man in the state of mortal sin. What are you, then, if you be guilty of any? Has God forgiven you? Be it so;—but still, you once were unfaithful to him, you once transgressed his laws, revolted against him, and said, in your heart at least, ‘I will not serve.’⁵—‘Know then, and see, that it is an evil and a bitter thing for you, to have left the Lord your God.’⁶ You hope that God has forgiven you,—I will not pretend to shake the foundation of that hope; but, admitting that you may have a moral certainty of your being in the state of grace, I shall ask, whether you can obtain any certainty of having fully atoned for your sins. Of this you can have no certainty whatever;—and yet, you cannot enjoy eternal bliss before you have fully satisfied God’s justice, either in this world, or in the next.

These are awful considerations. They should deeply impress upon our minds the sentiment of our unworthiness.

1 Isaias xl. 6. 7. 17.

3 Ps. cxviii. 73.

5 Jerem. ii. 20.

2 Gal. vi. 3.

4 Acts xvii. 25. 23.

6 Jerem. ii. 19.

‘All our hope,’ as St. Austin speaks, ‘is in the great mercy of God, who, when he rewards our merits, rewards his own gifts.’ Nor is our crown secured to us:—‘our adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour;’¹ and,—‘through many tribulations, we must enter into the kingdom of God.’²

SECTION IV.

Three degrees of humility.

THE first degree of humility, according to St. Bonaventure, consists in having a low opinion of ourselves. Humility is a virtue, remarks Saint Lawrence Justinian, with regard to which we are often mistaken, and no one knows well what it is, unless he has received it from God. You think, he adds, that it consists in saying that you are a great sinner, a wretched creature, &c. If it were so, it would be then very easy to acquire it; and in fact, we should all be humble; for we all hold this language; though, in truth, many speak in this manner merely through habit, and without any real sentiment of humility. You also imagine, that it consists in the plainness of your dress and manners; but in this, you are again mistaken; for, external things, though they may greatly contribute to humility, do not, however, necessarily prove its existence. Many, says Saint Jerom, follow the shadow of humility, but there are few who follow the reality. It is easy to walk with our eyes cast down, to speak with an humble tone of voice, to express sorrow for our sins, &c. But these are equivocal, and often deceitful signs. Let us lay aside affectation in words, and behaviour. It is patience, which shows a man to be truly humble.

‘We love humility in others,’ says Bourdaloue, ‘why are we so unwilling to acquire and practise it ourselves?—Here

is the explanation of this mystery, which I may call a mystery of pride and iniquity. Humility, in others, prompts them to place themselves beneath us; and this is what we like: humility, in us, would prompt us to place ourselves beneath others; and this is what we do not like. It is true, we speak of ourselves with great modesty and humility, and blush at the praises which are given us. All this is very edifying;—but, let any one find fault with us, or show by his conduct that he thinks little of us,—we are immediately offended,—we justify ourselves in an angry tone, and retaliate with bitterness. Humility and pride are here combined together. Nor is it difficult to account for it. To speak modestly of one's-self, is only apparent humiliation, and often a means to be raised in the estimation of others; but to be thought little of, or censured, is real humiliation, and therefore becomes insufferable. Let us humble ourselves, but let us do it sincerely and earnestly. Then, our humility will be preferable to talent, to success, and even to the gift of miracles; for, it will be a safer way to salvation. Many, in the pursuit of the most laudable works, have been lost, by the eclat of their talents, of their success, and of their miracles; but, no one was ever lost, by the sentiments which true and solid humility inspires.'

The second degree of humility consists in wishing that others would view us in the same light, in which the first degree places us in our own estimation; or, to use the words of St. Bonaventure, 'in loving to be unknown, and despised.' Difficult as it is, this degree is a natural consequence of the first; for if we had a low opinion of ourselves, the love of truth alone would suffice to make us wish that others should have the same opinion of us. To facilitate its practice, the saints generally distinguish four parts in it, which are as so many steps, by which we may gradually rise to its perfection.

The first step is, not to seek the praise, or esteem of the world; but to shun it, as far as duty permits,—never saying or doing any thing, with a view to obtain applause, or commendation. The second, consists in bearing patiently with the want of regard, respect, or esteem, shown us by others, and, in general, with whatever may be to us a source of shame and humiliation. It is the advice of the wise man: ‘Son,’ he says, ‘take all that shall be brought upon thee; and in thy sorrow, endure; and in thy humiliation, keep patience; for gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.’¹

When we have ascended the third step, we no longer feel any pleasure or satisfaction in being praised and esteemed by others, but we are utterly insensible to both. The proud are always delighted when they receive praise and applause, whether they deserve them or not; for they do not care about what they are in reality, before God, but merely about what they are thought to be by men. He who is truly humble, dislikes to hear himself praised. He fears, says St. Gregory, lest, if the praises he receives are unmerited, they may turn to his judgment and condemnation before God; and lest if he deserves them, they may be his only recompense. Thus, praise, which renders the proud more vain and ostentatious, causes the humble to think less of themselves, and wish to be forgotten by the world.

The fourth step, which leads to the perfection of the second degree of humility, is, to wish to be despised, and to rejoice in being insulted and affronted. Saint Bernard remarks, that there are two sorts of humility;—one, in the understanding, by which, considering our misery and wretchedness, we despise ourselves, and think that we deserve to be despised by all men;—the other, in the will, by which we are desirous to be actually despised and treated with contempt. Jesus Christ, adds the same saint, could not have

the first kind of humility; for, 'being in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery himself to be equal to God,'¹ he could not despise himself, nor think himself worthy of contempt. But he possessed the second,—that which resides in the will and heart,—when 'he debased himself, taking the form of a servant,'²—when, through love for us, he was 'despised,'³ and became 'the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people.'⁴ As for us, we ought to possess both; in man, the first, without the second, is false and deceitful.

And let us not plead an imaginary impossibility, as an excuse from aiming at this perfection. If we wish it, says St. Austin, we can, with the assistance of grace, reach to its summit; for, when Christ tells us 'to learn from him, because he is meek and humble of heart,' he evidently teaches us that we ought, and, consequently, are able, to imitate him in the practice of these virtues. O Teacher and Lord of mortals, who have swallowed death out of the cup of pride! exclaims this great saint, what are we to learn from thee?—'that thou art meek and humble of heart?'—Are 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that are hidden in thee,'⁵ reduced to this? Is it, then, so great a thing to be little, that we cannot learn it, unless we are taught by thee? Yes, he adds, to make one's-self little, is a thing so great and so difficult, that man would never have been able to accomplish it, had not God himself shown him the example; for there is nothing so deeply rooted in the human heart, as the desire of praise, and esteem. But, if the remedy offered to us in the incarnation of the Son of God, who 'was made flesh, and dwelt among us,'⁶ does not cure our pride, I know not what else can cure it.

The third degree of humility consists in taking no pride in the spiritual gifts which God has bestowed upon us, and in referring entirely to him, both the good which they ena-

1 Philip. ii. 6.

3 Isaias liii. 3.

5 Col. ii. 3.

2 Philip. ii. 6.

4 Ps. xxi. 7.

6 John i. 14.

ble us to accomplish, and the honor which may thereby accrue to us. It teaches us to distinguish what we are by the mercy of God, from what we are by the corruption of our own nature ;—not, merely, to know that, of ourselves, we cannot do any good towards our salvation, but to act according to this knowledge on every occasion. The knowledge itself, is easily acquired,—it is an article of faith, which we have been taught from our infancy,—but the practice is difficult, and its constant application, in our conduct, is a great perfection. It is a rare and sublime virtue, says St. Bernard, to do great things, and to be ignorant of our own greatness; to be considered as saints by others, and to look upon ourselves as sinners; to be admired by all, and contemptible in our own estimation. This is what St. Chrysostom particularly admired in the apostles, and many other great saints, who, whilst they had received the greatest gifts from God,—raised the dead to life, and performed innumerable other miracles,—still entertained a profound sense of their nothingness, and regarded themselves as the unworthy instruments of God's mercy.

Those who have arrived at the third degree of humility, use every means in their power to acquire virtue, to resist temptations, and to succeed in their pious undertakings; but,—after they have done all that depended upon them,—they consider themselves 'as unprofitable servants,'¹ rely upon God alone for the success, and refer it all to him. Thus, they offer him the most acceptable act of thanksgiving for the graces and gifts, which they have received from his liberality,—that 'sacrifice of praise,' which, he says, 'shall glorify him.'²

1 Luke xvii. 10.

2 Ps. xlix. 23.

SECTION V.

Humility supplies what is wanting to us in other respects, and is a sure means to obtain the special protection of God.

It is a great folly, says St. Bernard, to place our confidence in any thing else than humility. 'In many things we all offend,'¹ and are obliged to plead guilty; 'if man will contend with God, he cannot answer him one for a thousand.'² What else can we do, then, than to have recourse to humility, and supply, thereby, what is wanting to us in other respects? If our intention is not pure enough, and our fervor abates, let us endeavor to make up the deficiency, by a salutary shame, and an humble acknowledgment of our imperfection. Humble yourselves, said abbot John to his disciples, in order to secure your salvation. If your weak constitution prevents you from applying to hard labor,—be zealous, at least, in the practice of humility;—by this means, you will please God as much as those who are able to work much. If after having, for a long time, 'wearied yourselves in the way of iniquity,'³ you find your health too delicate to walk in the narrow paths of penance, austerities, and sufferings,—enter the road of humility;—you could not choose a safer one.

'If you are not able to be recollected during mental prayer,' says Bourdaloue, 'humble yourself for the spiritual dryness of your heart, and the perpetual wanderings of your mind. If your health does not permit you to practise austerities and bodily mortification,—humble yourself for the care you are obliged to take of it, and the mitigations, to which you are compelled to have recourse. By this means, humility will supply, before God, the want of such good works as you cannot perform; and this supplement will, un-

1 James iii. 2.

2 Job ix. 3.

3 Wis. v. 7.

questionably, be more meritorious than these good works themselves. For, what is most difficult in the christian religion is not,—to apply to mental prayer, or mortification, but,—to humble one's-self.'

'With a little more humility, we should often spare ourselves much trouble, and humiliation. When we forget ourselves, and speak or act inconsiderately, we commit a fault,—were we to acknowledge it immediately, and express our regret for it, the thing would go no farther. But, if we endeavor to excuse and justify ourselves, if we argue and contend with those who admonish us, and wish to make us sensible of our error; the consequence is, that they soon become offended by our pride and obstinacy, and think it their duty to mortify and humble us.'

'A father of the church, says that the remembrance of our sins, is infinitely more profitable to us, than the remembrance of our good works. For the remembrance of our good works, is calculated to inspire us with pride, whilst the remembrance of our sins serves to humble us. Whence we must draw this two-fold inference:—to practice virtue, and afterwards veil our eyes, lest we should see the good we have done:—to shun sin, and when we have had the misfortune to fall into it, to draw the veil from our eyes, that we may always see the evil we have committed. Thus, we shall be virtuous, without danger; and derive some benefit, even from our faults.'

Humility is not only a supplement of what may be wanting to other virtues, but it averts the humiliation, with which God punishes the proud. Let us therefore humble ourselves, lest God should humble us. 'Behold! I come against thee, O proud one! saith the Lord, the God of hosts;—the proud one shall fall; he shall fall down, and there shall be none to lift him up.'¹—'Every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled.'² St. Chrysostom calls

pride a folly, and after quoting the text of Isaias, 'the fool will always speak foolish things,'¹ he adds: Will you hear some of the follies to which pride has led presumptuous mortals? 'My hand,' said the king of Assyria, 'hath found the strength of the people as a nest; and as eggs are gathered, that are left, so have I gathered all the earth, and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or made the least noise.'² Again: 'I will ascend into heaven,' said the king of Babylon; 'I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit in the mountain of the covenant, in the sides of the north. I will ascend above the height of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'³ Not only do the proud speak like mad men, but they must also be spoken to, as mad men, whom we dare not contradict. The only way to please them, and to gain their good will, is to praise, and flatter them. To be candid with them, and endeavor to undeceive them, would be dangerous for us, and useless to them. Ecclesiastes alluded to this evil, when he said: 'I saw the wicked buried, who also when they were yet living were in the holy place, and were praised in the city, as men of just works; but this also is vanity.'⁴

Speaking of wisdom, Solomon says that 'all good things came to him together with her.'⁵ He who is truly humble, can justly say the same of humility. And, in effect, as we read in the book of proverbs, 'where humility is, there also is wisdom.'⁶ This truth is, moreover, plainly and distinctly taught us, by innumerable texts of holy scripture, in which God promises to bestow his assistance and choicest gifts, on the humble, the little, and the poor of spirit.

Take the following:

'To whom shall I have respect,' says the Lord, in Isaias, 'but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my words?'⁷

1 Isai. xxxii. 6.

3 Isai xiv. 13. 44.

5 Wis. vii. 11.

7 Isai. lvi. 2.

2 Isai. x. 14.

4 Eccl. viii. 10.

6 Prov. xi. 2.

‘God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.’¹

‘Thou wilt save the humble people; but wilt bring down the eyes of the proud.’²

‘The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart; and he will save the humble of spirit.’³

‘A contrite, and humbled heart, O God! thou wilt not despise.’⁴

‘He hath regard to the prayer of the humble; and he hath not despised their petition.’⁵

‘Every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.’⁶

God is high, says St. Austin,—you humble yourself, and he comes down to you,—you exalt yourself, and he withdraws from you. And why?—because, ‘the Lord is high, and looketh on the low; and the high he knoweth afar off;’⁷—because, ‘great is the power of God alone; and he is honored by the humble.’⁸

SECTION VI.

*Solid and true greatness of christian humility.**

SOME persons, otherwise well inclined, entertain very erroneous notions concerning humility, and consider it a virtue suitable only for narrow and weak minds. To undeceive them, let us examine, with them, its nature, the principles on which it is founded, the rules by which it is guided;—let us show them—the weakness of which it cures us, the superiority it imparts over the ordinary maxims of the world—the victories it achieves, the enterprises it exe-

1 Pet. v. 5—James iv. 6—Prov. iii. 34.

2 Ps. xvii. 28.

3 Ps. xxxiii. 19.

4 Ps. l. 19.

5 Ps. ci. 18.

6 Luke xiv. 11—xviii. 14.

7 Ps. cxxxvii. 6.

8 Eccl. iii. 21.

* From Bourdaloue.

cutes,—and they will be compelled to acknowledge, that no virtue indicates more clearly than this, both strength of understanding and firmness of character ;—that, far from contracting, it expands the mind,—preserves us from innumerable acts of meanness, innumerable relaxations of principle,—prompts to the greatest designs, and enables us to accomplish them with unyielding constancy ;—in a word, that it unites all the characteristics of true, and solid greatness.

There is, I grant, a certain natural timidity, which renders some men gentle, docile, and submissive ; which prevents them from interfering in any thing of importance ; which seals their lips, and fetters their hands, when duty bids them speak, and act. But this is not humility. It is pusillanimity, excessive diffidence,—the effect of temperament,—under which, there often lurks a great deal of puerile pride. Thus, when those persons ought to speak, they are mute ; because they fear they may speak inappropriately, and expose themselves to ridicule : when they ought to adopt a resolution and maintain it, they remain inactive ; because they fear they shall not succeed, and they dread the confusion of failure : when they ought to resist an encroachment, and assert their just rights, they give way, through apprehension of defeat, and some consequent advantage to a rival.

Such is not the humility which the Son of God has taught us, and which all the saints have practised after their divine Master. I mean that humility, which, by the lights of reason and religion, discovers to us our nothingness, and depth of misery ; which inspires us with a holy self-contempt, and a vivid conception of our natural incapacity to do good ; which makes us ascribe to ourselves nothing but sin, and refer to God alone the glory of every thing he enables us to do by his grace ; which causes us to regard with indifference all the distinctions, and honors that the world can confer ;—because, through their brightest lustre, we discern their

illusion and vanity, and know besides that they are opposed to the condition of Jesus Christ throughout the whole course of his mortal life;—which, omitting all emulation with our neighbor, induces us to honor him, to hold with cheerfulness a lower rank, than he, and remain neglected and obscure whilst others are in high esteem and splendor; which, finally, relies exclusively on God, who delights to succour the weak, and exert his mercy and omnipotence in favor of the little. Such is christian humility, a virtue to form great characters, and perfect them.

Let us in the first place, consider from what humility delivers us, what it corrects in us, and against what it preserves us. Every one knows to what acts of littleness, not to say baseness, pride and ambition degrade us. Follow, first, in imagination, the ambitious man through the path which he considers the road to fortune and aggrandizement. Is there a step so humiliating to which he does not stoop, if he thinks it will conduct him to his object? In the hope of mounting, to what does he not descend? Is there a complaisance so servile, to which he does not subject himself to conciliate the favor of one person or another? Is there insolence, contempt, or rebuff, which he will not sustain to engage this one to his interest, or secure the protection of that one? What assiduities! what suppleness! what flatteries! He blushes at nothing, provided he can attain his end, and succeed in his intrigues:—and what intrigues?—often the most criminal, and unprincipled,—in which are violated all the laws of justice, and of honor,—in which are employed artifice, calumny, fraud, and treason. He would regard them with horror, were he not possessed by a passion, which blinds him; and if he judged of them in his right senses.

Observe next, the conduct of the proud man; contemplate the countless conceits, alike frivolous and silly, he revolves within his mind; examine the foundation of his secret joys,

his triumphs, his keenest sufferings, and bitterest disgusts. Is he occupied with any thing but himself, his own merits, and endowments? Is there an advantage so trivial in which he does not glory, and which does not, in his opinion, invest him with enviable pre-eminence? Is any thing well done, if not by himself? Any thing well conceived, if not in accordance with his opinion? Add to this, the favorable testimony he perpetually is bearing to himself; the nauseous and disgusting boastings, with which he wearies all who will listen to him; the love of flattery, gross as it may be; the zest with which he receives it, and the delight he derives from it, insomuch that to praise him is sufficient to obtain any thing from him. And on the other hand, consider the sensibility he manifests to a trifle which might offend,—the agitations into which he is thrown,—the despondency to which he sinks,—the jealousies he entertains,—the bitterness of soul he experiences,—the suspicions and umbrage he conceives, from a gesture, a glance, a word dropped by chance and without design. To omit a thousand other instances, is there any thing so contracted as a soul of disposition like this?

Now of all those weaknesses there is none, from which christian humility is not exempt.—A truly humble Christian, is one who has no other views than those of God, and his adorable providence;—who is correct in all his ways, and incapable of adopting measures contrary to the laws of probity, and truth;—who is disinterested, and religious in his voluntary humiliations,—the enemy of flattery, and all mercenary, or forced subjection,—equitable in his judgments, free from prejudice or envy;—who acknowledges merit wherever it exists, and considers it a duty to reverence, and exalt it, even to his own detriment;—who is superior to all human respect, and the vain opinions of the world; because he seeks not to please the world, and regards it as nothing. Hence he is always the same,—in

humiliation as in prosperity, in praise as in blame, in evil report as in good report;—he does not suffer himself to be dazzled by the glare of an active and glorious life, nor is he saddened by the obscurity of an abject and forgotten one. Hence also is he patient of injuries, sincere in forgiving them, more ready to make advances towards reconciliation, than to exact redress. Finally, he is modest and reserved in his manners and deportment; courteous, affable, peaceful; and, he is all this, from superior and divine motives, notwithstanding the rebellion of his nature.

To be more explicit, the humble Christian conforms himself strictly to the order of Providence, and aspires not beyond it. He does not yield to a senseless ardor for aggrandizement, but restrains himself within the limits which it has pleased God to mark out for him. He says, with David, ‘Lord! my heart is not exalted; nor are my eyes lofty; neither have I walked in great matters, nor in wonderful things above me.’¹ It is not that he is free from the attacks of a lurking ambition. That pride which is so natural to us, is always eager to advance;—there are times and conjunctures, when temptation is hard to overcome; but the humble Christian knows how to repress and subdue it, with a holy violence. He is what God has made him, what God chooses him to be;—that is enough,—what needs he more? If Providence should call him to something higher, it is well;—he awaits in peace the summons. Till then, he has no other care, than to live acceptably to God in his actual state, and to accomplish his career in holiness. What energy there is, in moderation like this! and to maintain it, how many combats and victories over one’s-self are necessary!

The natural consequence of dispositions like these, is, to walk only in the ways of God, and never swerve from them. Desiring to be nothing but in conformity to the will of God,

the humble Christian has no projects to arrange, no means to devise, no springs to set in motion, for his own advancement. Hence he needs neither partisans, nor intrigue. He pursues invariably the same course, without deviation, or disguise. Armed with the maxims of the gospel, which is truth itself, he never has recourse, on any occasion, to falsehood, which the gospel condemns, and being free from those ambitious desires, which might seduce or corrupt him, he is far from putting in practice those criminal measures, the falsity and turpitude of which he clearly perceives.

Again, there is a pretended humility, which is only apparent, and there are feigned humiliations, which consist only in false professions, and a deceitful exterior. The worldling often humbles himself, but why? through frail hope, through base flattery, through vile and sordid slavery. Religion inspires the humble Christian, even in his most profound abasement, with far more generosity and dignity. He does honor to his neighbor, he entertains for him all possible deference, and respect; he would not refuse, if necessary, to crawl upon the dust beneath his feet; but in this, what has he in view?—the man? No, most assuredly; for he regards not, and wants nothing from the man. But in the man, he has regard to God. In obeying the individual, he obeys his God; in rendering homage to the creature, he offers incense to his Creator. He prostrates himself before God, in bowing down to man. God is the only object of his worship, as he is to be its only recompense.

Equity of judgments, is, if I may use the expression, one of the noblest efforts of humility. For as we are generally prejudiced, either in our own favor, by self-love, or against our neighbor, by a malignant envy, little reliance can be placed in the justice of our decisions concerning either ourselves, or others. But, the humble Christian being disengaged from those prejudices which blind us, is in a much better state for judging justly;—he neither dissembles, nor

denies the truth ;—he speaks as he thinks,—and he usually thinks well. If therefore the question concerns himself, he does not overrate his merit ; if it relates to his neighbor, he does him full justice ; and, far from undervaluing or concealing his deserts, he is the first to give them publicity.

Christian humility is no obstacle to great actions,—to enterprises which require magnanimity, and invincible resolution. Its foundation, it is true, is a conviction of our weakness, and a habitual consciousness of our insufficiency. A man truly humble is persuaded that he is nothing, that of himself he can do nothing good. Hence, it does not appear natural that he should conceive projects, or desire to engage in undertakings, which call for rare and peculiar talents. But it is no less true, that nothing, as St. Leo says, is difficult to the humble ; that there is no enterprise so vast as to disconcert and confound them ; that they are capable of daring any thing, and meeting every danger with the most firm, and heroic intrepidity ; that the weaker they consider themselves, the stronger they feel ; and that, in proportion to their self-distrust, are the ardor of their zeal and the expansion of their views. For the humble Christian is as confident in God, as he is diffident of himself. The less he depends on himself, the more he relies upon his Maker. He knows that to God, nothing is impossible ;—that he delights to manifest his glory in our weakness, and communicates his grace, most abundantly, to the feeblest who put their trust in him. Animated by these considerations, and armed, as it were, with the omnipotence of God himself,—is there any thing so painful or laborious, so lofty or so great, that he fears to undertake, or despairs to achieve ? Let God call, and he will no more hesitate, than Isaias, to answer : Lo ! here am I ; send me.¹ Let God send him whithersoever he pleases, and he will go. He will go before the powers of the world, he will enter the courts of kings ; he

will announce to them the mandates of heaven, unmoved by the splendor of their array, insensible to their promises, unappalled by their threats. To use the figurative language of scripture: he will 'plant, and root up;' he will 'build, and pull down.'¹

What a wonderful union of things apparently so incompatible!—so much diffidence on the one hand, and so much confidence on the other! For, in doing all this, the humble Christian loses none of his humility; he never forgets his weakness. He considers himself an unprofitable servant, a mere child; he says to his God, in the spirit of the prophet Jeremias, 'Ah! Lord God, behold I cannot speak.'² It is true,—he can do nothing by himself;—but while he confesses this, most earnestly and sincerely,—he forgets not, what he has learned from the apostle of the gentiles,—that 'he can do all things in him who strengtheneth him.'³ Thus, whatever be the work to which he is called by Almighty God, he does not hesitate to undertake it. Let him foresee a thousand difficulties, and a thousand obstacles;—let success appear, not only doubtful, but even beyond the range of probability,—he hopes against hope itself.

Nor is this conduct, the effect of presumptuous temerity; for his hope is founded on that great principle of St. Paul: 'The foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong: and the mean things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and the things that are not, that he might destroy the thing that are.'⁴ Thus when David beheld the gigantic Philistine approaching,—'Thou comest to me,' he said, 'with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel; and the Lord

1 Jerem. i. 10.

2 Jerem. i. 6.

3 Phil. iv. 13.

4 1 Cor i. 27. 28.

will deliver thee into my hand, and I will slay thee, and take away thy head from thee,—that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear.¹

Such is the confidence with which humility inspires humble souls;—they feel the more assured of God's protection, as they depend less upon themselves;—nor are they deterred from their enterprises, by the fear of disappointment, and the shame of discomfiture, which God may sometimes permit them to meet with. A worldling, led on by pride, could not, as we have already remarked, expose himself so easily;—he dreads to risk his honor;—serious examinations, and long deliberations are necessary to fix his resolution. But the humble are not so jealous of empty fame, nor so sensitive to the reproaches they would experience in the event of failure. They give themselves up to the guidance of the Spirit of God, and resign themselves to every thing that may happen for their humiliation before mankind.

These are not mere speculations: we have seen them exemplified in practice. Was there ever an enterprise like that of the apostles, when they divided themselves among all the nations of the earth, and undertook the conversion of the world? The most illustrious conquerors, whose exploits are blazoned on the page of profane history, have extended their dominion over a few nations; but these holy conquerors, or rather, these holy and zealous propagators of the christian law, proposed to themselves to subject all the world to the empire of Jesus Christ. Neither age, nor sex, nor rank, was excepted from their design. To judge of it by the rules of worldly prudence, it was a chimerical undertaking. Yet we know, how ardently they engaged in it, with what constancy they persevered, and how happily they achieved it.

And, who were these apostles?—poor fishermen, weak and little, in the eyes of the world, and humble according to the gospel. Yet their humility did not limit their views, contract their hearts, weaken their resolutions, shake their constancy, or arrest their progress. Humble as they were,—they crossed seas, traversed kingdoms and provinces, replied to judges and magistrates, resisted the powerful, confounded the wise, instructed infidels and barbarians, and triumphed over idolatry and paganism. And, in after ages,—how numerous have been their imitators, and successors, who, humble as they, devoted themselves to perpetuate the fruits of their zeal!—how many, even at the present day, combine the same humility with the same elevation of sentiments!

To return to the apostles,—can we read the epistles of St. Paul, without being struck by the greatness of his mind and character? What fire! what vivacity! and, withal, what firmness!—Who thinks more nobly? who speaks more eloquently?—What did he not achieve, and undergo! superior as he was to dangers, to persecutions, to treasons, to calumnies, to disgrace, to chains, to hunger, to thirst, to the sword, to death:—‘In all these things we overcome,’¹ says he. Yet, this great apostle, this vessel of election, what contempt did he not feel and express for himself! What was he in his own eyes?—a sinner, a blasphemer, a persecutor of the church, an abortion, a man unworthy of the apostleship;—so vividly did his humility represent him to himself, and so much did it lower him in his own esteem.

We might add much, to the same purpose, concerning those religious orders and associations, which are the schools of perfection for either sex, and whose sanctity edifies the christian world. What has it not cost to form those great bodies, to assemble their members, organize and

regulate them! What studies and cares, what meditations, reflections, and consultations! But also, what surprising progress! These societies have multiplied; they have spread themselves through every place enlightened by the faith and submissive to the Church of Christ. Like so many republics, they have established their government, their laws, their statutes, their offices, their functions, their observances, all which required the utmost penetration and sagacity. And to whom, under God, are we indebted for those holy establishments?—is it to skilful politicians, and their intrigues?—is it to philosophers, proud of their learning, and puffed up with vanity? We cannot answer better, than in the words of the Son of God: ‘I give thanks to thee, O Father! Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones.’¹—An humble Francis of Assisium, an humble Francis of Paula, and others equally humble, were found to be the most fit to comprehend the designs of Providence, and the best prepared to promote them.

1 Luke x. 21

CHAPTER XIX

ON TEMPTATIONS.

SECTION I.

Temptations are unavoidable in this life, and intended by Divine Providence to be highly beneficial to us.

SAINT JEROM, writing on these words of Ecclesiastes, 'there is a time of war, and a time of peace,'¹ says,—that 'the time of war lasts as long as we remain in this world, and that the time of peace will commence, only when we are in heaven. Let no one, he adds, think himself secure in time of war;—we have continually to fight, that we may one day enjoy undisturbed peace.'² 'The life of man upon earth is a warfare;'³—temptations, whilst it lasts, are unavoidable. Thus, when our Lord bid his apostles 'watch and pray,' he did not bid them do so, in order that they might be *exempt from* temptation; but, 'watch and pray,' said he,—'that ye *enter not into* temptation;'⁴ that is,—that you may not '*yield to,*' and '*be overcome by*' temptation. Thus, again, St. Paul exhorting the Galatians 'to walk in the Spirit,' does not say, that they will, thereby, *be freed from* 'the lusts of the flesh;'⁵ but, 'walk in the Spirit,' he tells them,—'and you shall not *fulfil* the lusts of the flesh.'⁵ It is a great error, and often a very pernicious one, to imagine, that when we are assailed by violent temptations, God must have forsaken us. 'The life of the just,' says St. Austin, 'is not a triumph, but a combat.'

1 Eccl. iii. 8.

2 2 Tim. ii. 5.

3 Job vii. 1.

4 Mat. xxvi. 41.

5 Gal. v. 16.

The cause of this continual war, which we have to carry on, is within us;—‘The corruptible body is a load upon the soul;’¹—‘The flesh lusteth against the spirit.’² St. James having asked the question, ‘from whence are wars and contentions among you?’ answers: ‘Come they not hence? from your concupiscences, which war in your members?’³ Add to this, the contagion of bad example, to be entirely exempt from which, ‘we must have gone out of this world;’⁴ and the snares of the devil, ‘our adversary,’ who, ‘as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour,’⁵—‘for our wrestling is not *merely* against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the world of this darkness—the spirit of wickedness.’⁶ To every one, therefore, who will peruse these pages, I shall say in the words of inspiration: ‘Son! when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation.’⁷

‘The Lord your God trieth you,’ said Moses to the Israelites, ‘that it may appear whether you love him with all your heart, and with all your soul, or no.’⁸ Temptations teach us what we are. They put our virtues to the true test; and distinguish those which are the effect of our natural disposition, or the mere result of circumstances, from those which are real, and deeply rooted in the heart;—a distinction, which, without the knowledge and experience they impart, it is not easy to make; for, ‘what doth he know that hath not been tried?’⁹

They divest us of that false confidence, which we rashly place in ourselves, when we are unmolested by them. They are a painful, but often a necessary counterpoise to that secret pride, with which the gifts of God, and the practice of certain virtues, are apt to inspire us. Under their pressure, we learn to distrust our own strength, we acknow-

1 Wis. ix. 15.

4 1 Cor. iv. 10.

7 Eccel. ii. 1.

2 Gal. v. 17.

5 1 Pet. v. 8.

8 Deut. xiii. 3.

3 James iv. 1.

6 Eph. vi. 12.

9 Eccl. xxxiv. 9.

ledge our weakness, and feel the need we have of the assistance of Him, 'who causeth us to triumph in Christ Jesus.'¹

The saints remark, that God, by a secret and adorable disposition of his providence, permits the elect to be tempted and afflicted, to detach them from this world, to withdraw their hearts from its fleeting and dangerous enjoyments, and to induce them to look for happiness, peace, and glory, to the heavenly inheritance which he has prepared for them.

Considered as sufferings and crosses, temptations call for the exercise of the most essential virtues, such as prayer, self-denial, and mortification. Like them, they increase our merit, and multiply our rewards: 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation,' says St. James, 'for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life.'² From this text, St. Bernard infers the necessity of temptations: 'It is necessary,' says he, 'that temptations should come; for we shall not be crowned unless we fight lawfully,³ and how can we fight, if no one attacks us?' This necessity is clearly expressed in the words of the angel to Tobias: 'Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.'⁴

SECTION II.*

Three incontestable principles with regard to the help of grace in temptations.

1. WITHOUT the help of God's grace we cannot overcome temptations, that is to say, we cannot obtain over them a holy and christian victory; for to overcome one temptation by another, one sin by another sin,—the desire of revenge by self-interested views, interest by pleasure,

1 2 Cor. ii. 14.

2 James i. 12.

3 2 Tim. ii. 5.

4 Tob. xii. 13.

* From Bourdaloue.

pleasure by ambition,—are the victories of the world, in which the grace of God has no share;—but, to overcome all these temptations, and the world itself, for God's sake, is the victory of grace and of our faith.¹

2. There is no temptation, but can be overcome, with the help of God's grace. The beloved disciple gives an excellent reason for it, when he says to the faithful: He who is among you, by his grace, is much stronger than he who is in the world,² and reigns in it as prince of the world.³ Therefore, to believe a temptation insurmountable, and say, as many do, I cannot resist this passion, I cannot control this habit, and inclination, is to offer an injury to God: it is, according St. Bernard, the language of infidelity, still more than that of weakness. Because, in speaking so, we either take into consideration our own strength only, apart from that of God,—and then, we tell the truth, but we speak as infidels; or we have regard to the grace and help of God,—and then, our assertion is not only false, but heretical.⁴

3. The help of grace is never wanting to us in temptation. God is always ready to aid us; but, at the same time, he wishes us to act, and to make use of his graces agreeably to the end for which they are given to us. Temptations are assaults from our enemy;—the graces of God are means to repel them;—they are graces of combat, of defence, of attack, of resistance. To depend upon them, without being determined to resist and combat the temptation, is to fancy to ourselves an imaginary and chimerical assistance, and to go against the views and designs of Providence.

St. Paul teaches us, that 'God will not suffer us to be tempted above that which we are able;'⁵ but 'we are able,' only by grace;—therefore, the assistance of grace, is never

1 1 John v. 4.

3 John xii. 31.—xiv. 30.

5 1 Cor. x. 13.

2 1 John iv. 4.

4 Phil. iv. 13.

wanting to us, not only to overcome temptation, but to profit by it. The same apostle, however, by a figure which the Holy Ghost dictated to him, speaks of 'the shield' of faith, 'the breast-plate' of justice, 'the helmet of hope,' and exhorts us to put on these spiritual arms: 'Take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect.'¹

SECTION III.

Conduct we are to observe with regard to temptations.

THERE are temptations, of which we may avoid the occasions, and from which we are at liberty to withdraw;—the only rule which can be given with regard to them, is, to consult our safety by a speedy flight. As to those temptations, to which we find ourselves necessarily exposed, against our own will and inclination;—'to watch and pray,' is the line of conduct prescribed by our Lord himself,² 'that we enter not into,'—that is, as the saints observe,—'*yield not to,*' and '*be not overcome by*' them. The necessity and efficacy of this means have already been proved.³ I shall content myself with suggesting here a few short and fervent prayers, which may be used whilst the temptation lasts :

'Lord! I suffer violence; answer thou for me.'⁴

'Have mercy on me, O Lord! see my humiliation, which I suffer from my enemies.'⁵

'O Lord! rise up to help me;—say to my soul, I am thy salvation.'⁶

'Have mercy on me, O God! have mercy on me; for my

1 Ephes. vi. 13.

2 Mat. xxvi. 4.

31

3 Chap. v. sec. 2.

4 Isaias xxxviii. 14.

5 Ps. ix. 14.

6 Ps. xxxiv. 2. 3.

soul trusteth in thee ; and in the shadow of thy wings will I hope.’¹

‘Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered;—as smoke vanisheth, so let them vanish away.’²

‘Hear me, O Lord ! for thy mercy is kind ; look upon me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies.—I am in trouble, hear me speedily.’³

‘Though I should walk, in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.’⁴

‘In thee, O Lord ! have I hoped, let me never be confounded ;—Be thou unto me a God, a protector ;—Have mercy on me, O Lord ! for I am afflicted.’⁵

A lively sense of the presence of God is another efficacious means, not only to conquer, but to profit by temptations. ‘Its practice,’ says Fenelon, ‘is the sovereign remedy against them. It supports, it consoles, it calms.’ I have spoken of it elsewhere.⁶

Diffidence of ourselves and confidence in God, are also sure means to overcome temptations. God is pleased to surround with a peculiar protection the humble Christian, who, conscious of his own weakness, expects his deliverance from him alone, and is ready to give him all the glory of the victory, which he hopes to obtain with the help of his grace. Innumerable passages from holy scripture can be adduced in support of this truth :

‘Shew forth thy wonderful mercies ; thou who savest them that trust in thee.’⁷

‘By thee I shall be delivered from temptation.—The Lord is the protector of all that trust in him.’⁸

‘Because he hoped in me, I will deliver him.’⁹

‘There is no confusion to them that trust in thee.’¹⁰

1 Ps. lvi. 2.

2 Ps. lxxvii. 1. 2.

3 Ps. lxxviii. 17. 18.

4 Ps. xxii. 4.

5 Ps. xxx. 2. 3. 10.

6 Chap. viii. sec. 1.

7 Ps. xvi. 7.

8 Ps. xvii. 30. 31.

9 Ps. xc. 14.

10 Dan. iii. 40.

‘Behold the generations of men; and know ye that no one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded.’¹

‘The great remedy against all temptations, whether great or little,’ says St. Francis of Sales, ‘is to make them known to our spiritual director;—to lay our heart open to him, and disclose our feelings with candor and humility.’ Temptations are diseases of the soul; they are as various, and often as intricate and treacherous, as those of the body: our spiritual director is the physician of our soul; he should, therefore, be well acquainted with the nature and progress of the temptation, in order to be able to prescribe the proper remedy, and point out, with certainty, the course which we are to follow. ‘A physician,’ says St. Jerom, ‘cures not a disease of which he has no knowledge.’

I shall conclude with one or two remarks, which are particularly applicable to temptations against faith and modesty. There are pure and pious souls, who suffer themselves to be thrown into great alarms and confusion, by thoughts against faith and purity;—imagining that they are a sign of reprobation, and a proof that God has forsaken them. But they are entirely mistaken, and labor under a dangerous illusion. They should take no notice of such thoughts. The uneasiness which they experience on their account, the fear which they entertain of consenting to them, and the efforts which they make to reject them, serve only to increase their influence on the imagination, and render them more formidable. Great advantages could be derived from such temptations, if we viewed them in the proper light;—but, if we suffer ourselves to be disconcerted by them, they may lead us to sin, and even to despair.

To avoid this awful consequence, we must not confound together the temptation itself, with the pleasure, which sometimes accompanies it, and the consent which may be

given to them. The mere temptation is no sin whatsoever; the pleasure may be felt against our will, and then, it is no sin either; the consent, alone, is always a sin. Let the temptation last ever so long;—let our feelings, whilst it lasts, be what they may,—if we take no pleasure in either, we shall incur no guilt. Under such circumstances, ‘we suffer, but we do not act,’ remarks St. Francis of Sales. ‘Whatever temptations may, hereafter, befall you,’ he adds, ‘or with whatever pleasure it may be attended, as long as you refuse your consent to both, do not suffer yourself to be in the least disturbed; for God is not offended.’ ‘The devil,’ says St. Austin, ‘is like a dog kept in chains;—bark he can, terrify he may,—but to bite, he is not able, unless it be those who are willing.’

THE END.

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